ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

25 ¢

JULY 1942

FLY PAPER	*Dashiell Hammett*
THE COLLECTOR OF CURIOSITIES	*Nicholas Olde*
THE THIRD FLOOR FLAT	*Agatha Christie*
SEESAW	*Laurence Dwight Smith*
THE FORTUNE TELLER	*Melville Davisson Post*
THE UNKNOWN MAN	*Frederick Irving Anderson*
THE WRONG PROBLEM	*John Dickson Carr*
THE MEANEST MAN IN THE WORLD	*Ellery Queen*

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

EDITOR

ELLERY QUEEN

VOL. 3 NO. 3 *JULY 1942*

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The author of "The Thin Man" and the creator of Nick Charles and Sam Spade is one of the great detective-story writers of America. Most experts agree that Dashiell Hammett reached his peak with the writing of "The Maltese Falcon" (the only modern detective novel selected by Modern Library). And here is a little-known, almost unknown, story by Hammett written just before he reached that peak — in fact, "Fly Paper" immediately preceded "The Maltese Falcon" in Hammett's typewriter. . . . Meet the Continental Op and the strange case of "The Count of Monte Cristo" that was stuck in — of all things! — fly paper.

FLY PAPER

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

IT WAS a wandering daughter job.

The Hambletons had been for several generations a wealthy and decently prominent New York family. There was nothing in the Hambleton history to account for Sue, the youngest member of the clan. She grew out of childhood with a kink that made her dislike the polished side of life, like the rough. By the time she was twenty-one, in 1926, she definitely preferred Tenth Avenue to Fifth, grifters to bankers, and Hymie the Riveter to the Honorable Cecil Windown, who had asked her to marry him.

The Hambletons tried to make Sue behave, but it was too late for that. She was legally of age. When she finally told them to go to hell and walked out on them there wasn't much they could do about it. Her father, Major Waldo Hambleton, had given up all the hopes he ever had of salvaging her, but he didn't want her to run into any grief that could be avoided. So he came into the Continental Detective Agency's New York office and asked to have an eye kept on her.

Hymie the Riveter was a Philadelphia racketeer who had moved north to the big city, carrying a Thompson submachine-gun wrapped in blue-checkered oil cloth, after a disagreement with his partners. New York wasn't so good a field as Philadelphia for machine-gun work. The Thompson lay idle for a year or so while Hymie made expenses with an automatic, preying on small-time crap games in Harlem.

Three or four months after Sue went to live with Hymie he made what looked like a promising connection with the first of the crew that came into New York from Chicago to organize the city on the western scale. But the

boys from Chi didn't want Hymie; they wanted the Thompson. When he showed it to them, as the big item in his application for employment, they shot holes in the top of Hymie's head and went away with the gun.

Sue Hambleton buried Hymie, had a couple of lonely weeks in which she hocked a ring to eat, and then got a job as hostess in a speakeasy run by a Greek named Vassos.

One of Vassos's customers was Babe McCloor, two hundred and fifty pounds of hard Scotch-Irish-Indian bone and muscle, a black-haired, blue-eyed, swarthy giant who was resting up after doing a fifteen-year hitch in Leavenworth for ruining most of the smaller post offices between New Orleans and Omaha. Babe was keeping himself in drinking money while he rested by playing with pedestrians in dark streets.

Babe liked Sue. Vassos liked Sue. Sue liked Babe. Vassos didn't like that. Jealousy spoiled the Greek's judgment. He kept the speakeasy door locked one night when Babe wanted to come in. Babe came in, bringing pieces of the door with him. Vassos got his gun out, but couldn't shake Sue off his arm. He stopped trying when Babe hit him with the part of the door that had the brass knob on it. Babe and Sue went away from Vassos's together.

Up to that time the New York office had managed to keep in touch with Sue. She hadn't been kept under constant surveillance. Her father hadn't wanted that. It was simply a matter of sending a man around every week or so to see that she was still alive, to pick up whatever information he could from her friends and neighbors, without, of course, letting her know she was being tabbed. All that had been easy enough, but when she and Babe went away after wrecking the gin mill, they dropped completely out of sight.

After turning the city upside-down, the New York office sent a journal on the job to the other Continental branches throughout the country, giving the information above and enclosing photographs and descriptions of Sue and her new playmate. That was late in 1927.

We had enough copies of the photographs to go around, and for the next month or so whoever had a little idle time on his hands spent it looking through San Francisco and Oakland for the missing pair. We didn't find them. Operatives in other cities, doing the same thing, had the same luck.

Then, nearly a year later, a telegram came to us from the New York office. Decoded, it read:

Major Hambleton today received telegram from daughter in San

Francisco quote *Please wire me thousand dollars care apartment two hundred six number six hundred one Eddis Street* stop *I will come home if you will let me* stop *Please tell me if I can come but please please wire money anyway* unquote *Hambleton authorizes payment of money to her immediately* stop *Detail competent operative to call on her with money and to arrange for her return home* stop *If possible have man and woman operative accompany her here* stop *Hambleton wiring her* stop *Report immediately by wire.*

II

The Old Man gave me the telegram and a check, saying:

"You know the situation. You'll know how to handle it."

I pretended I agreed with him, went down to the bank, swapped the check for a bundle of bills of several sizes, caught a street car, and went up to 601 Eddis Street, a fairly large apartment building on the corner of Larkin.

The name on Apartment 206's vestibule mail box was J. M. Wales.

I pushed 206's button. When the locked door buzzed off I went into the building, past the elevator to the stairs, and up a flight. 206 was just around the corner from the stairs.

The apartment door was opened by a tall, slim man of thirty-something in neat dark clothes. He had narrow dark eyes set in a long pale face. There was some gray in the dark hair brushed flat to his scalp.

"Miss Hambleton," I said.

"Uh — what about her?" His voice was smooth, but not too smooth to be agreeable.

"I'd like to see her."

His upper eyelids came down a little and the brows over them came a little closer together. He asked, "Is it —?" and stopped, watching me steadily.

I didn't say anything. Presently he finished his question:

"Something to do with a telegram?"

"Yeah."

His long face brightened immediately. He asked:

"You're from her father?"

"Yeah."

He stepped back and swung the door wide open, saying:

"Come in. Major Hambleton's wire came to her only a few minutes ago.

He said someone would call."

We went through a small passageway into a sunny living-room that was cheaply furnished, but neat and clean enough.

"Sit down," the man said, pointing at a brown rocking chair.

I sat down. He sat on the burlap-covered sofa facing me. I looked around the room. I didn't see anything to show that a woman was living there.

He rubbed the long bridge of his nose with a longer forefinger and asked slowly:

"You brought the money?"

I said I'd feel more like talking with her there.

He looked at the finger with which he had been rubbing his nose, and then up at me, saying softly:

"But I'm her friend."

I said, "Yeah?" to that.

"Yes," he repeated. He frowned slightly, drawing back the corners of his thin-lipped mouth. "I've only asked whether you've brought the money."

I didn't say anything.

"The point is," he said quite reasonably, "that if you brought the money she doesn't expect you to hand it over to anybody except her. If you didn't bring it she doesn't want to see you. I don't think her mind can be changed about that. That's why I asked if you had brought it."

"I brought it."

He looked doubtfully at me. I showed him the money I had got from the bank. He jumped up briskly from the sofa.

"I'll have her here in a minute or two," he said over his shoulder as his long legs moved him toward the door. At the door he stopped to ask: "Do you know her? Or shall I have her bring means of identifying herself?"

"That would be best," I told him.

He went out, leaving the corridor door open.

III

In five minutes he was back with a slender blonde girl of twenty-three in pale green silk. The looseness of her small mouth and the puffiness around her blue eyes weren't yet pronounced enough to spoil her prettiness.

I stood up.

"This is Miss Hambleton," he said.

She gave me a swift glance and then lowered her eyes again, nervously

playing with the strap of a handbag she held.

"You can identify yourself?" I asked.

"Sure," the man said. "Show them to him, Sue."

She opened the bag, brought out some papers and things, and held them up for me to take.

"Sit down, sit down," the man said as I took them.

They sat on the sofa. I sat in the rocking chair again and examined the things she had given me. There were two letters addressed to Sue Hambleton here, her father's telegram welcoming her home, a couple of receipted department store bills, an automobile driver's license, and a savings account pass book that showed a balance of less than ten dollars.

By the time I had finished my examination the girl's embarrassment was gone. She looked levelly at me, as did the man beside her. I felt in my pocket, found my copy of the photograph New York had sent us at the beginning of the hunt, and looked from it to her.

"Your mouth could have shrunk, maybe," I said, "but how could your nose have got that much longer?"

"If you don't like my nose," she said, "how'd you like to go to hell?" Her face had turned red.

"That's not the point. It's a swell nose, but it's not Sue's." I held the photograph out to her. "See for yourself."

She glared at the photograph and then at the man.

"What a smart guy you are," she told him.

He was watching me with dark eyes that had a brittle shine to them between narrow-drawn eyelids. He kept on watching me while he spoke to her out the side of his mouth, crisply:

"Pipe down."

She piped down. He sat and watched me. I sat and watched him. A clock ticked seconds away behind me. His eyes began shifting their focus from one of my eyes to the other. The girl sighed.

He said in a low voice: "Well?"

I said: "You're in a hole."

"What can you make out of it?" he asked casually.

"Conspiracy to defraud."

The girl jumped up and hit one of his shoulders angrily with the back of a hand, crying:

"What a smart guy you are, to get me in a jam like this. It was going to be

duck soup — yeh! Eggs in the coffee — yeh! Now look at you. You haven't even got guts enough to tell this guy to go chase himself." She spun around to face me, pushing her red face down at me — I was still sitting in the rocker — snarling: "Well, what are you waiting for? Waiting to be kissed good-bye? We don't owe you anything, do we? We didn't get any of your lousy money, did we? Outside, then. Take the air. Dangle."

"Stop it, sister," I growled. "You'll bust something."

The man said:

"For God's sake stop that bawling, Peggy, and give somebody else a chance." He addressed me: "Well, what do you want?"

"How'd you get into this?" I asked.

He spoke quickly, eagerly:

"A fellow named Kenny gave me that stuff and told me about this Sue Hambleton, and her old man having plenty. I thought I'd give it a whirl. I figured the old man would either wire the dough right off the reel or wouldn't send it at all. I didn't figure on this send-a-man stuff. Then when his wire came, saying he was sending a man to see her, I ought to have dropped it.

"But hell! Here was a man coming with a grand in cash. That was too good to let go of without a try. It looked like there still might be a chance of copping, so I got Peggy to do Sue for me. If the man was coming today, it was a cinch he belonged out here on the Coast, and it was an even bet he wouldn't know Sue, would only have a description of her. From what Kenny had told me about her, I knew Peggy would come pretty close to fitting her description. I still don't see how you got that photograph. Television? I only wired the old man yesterday. I mailed a couple of letters to Sue, here, yesterday, so we'd have them with the other identification stuff to get the money from the telegraph company on."

"Kenny gave you the old man's address?"

"Sure he did."

"Did he give you Sue's?"

"No."

"How'd Kenny get hold of the stuff?"

"He didn't say."

"Where's Kenny now?"

"I don't know. He was on his way east, with something else on the fire, and couldn't fool with this. That's why he passed it on to me."

"Big-hearted Kenny," I said. "You know Sue Hambleton?"

"No," emphatically. "I'd never even heard of her till Kenny told me."

"I don't like this Kenny," I said, "though without him your story's got some good points. Could you tell it leaving him out?"

He shook his head slowly from side to side, saying:

"It wouldn't be the way it happened."

"That's too bad. Conspiracies to defraud don't mean as much to me as finding Sue. I might have made a deal with you."

He shook his head again, but his eyes were thoughtful, and his lower lip moved up to overlap the upper a little.

The girl had stepped back so she could see both of us as we talked, turning her face, which showed she didn't like us, from one to the other as we spoke our pieces. Now she fastened her gaze on the man, and her eyes were growing angry again.

I got up on my feet, telling him:

"Suit yourself. But if you want to play it that way I'll have to take you both in."

He smiled with indrawn lips and stood up.

The girl thrust herself in between us, facing him.

"This is a swell time to be dummying up," she spit at him. "Pop off, you lightweight, or I will. You're crazy if you think I'm going to take the fall with you."

"Shut up," he said in his throat.

"Shut me up," she cried.

He tried to, with both hands. I reached over her shoulders and caught one of his wrists, knocked the other hand up.

She slid out from between us and ran around behind me, screaming:

"Joe does know her. He got the things from her. She's at the St. Martin on O'Farrell Street — her and Babe McCloor."

While I listened to this I had to pull my head aside to let Joe's right hook miss me, had got his left arm twisted behind him, had turned my hip to catch his knee, and had got the palm of my left hand under his chin. I was ready to give his chin the Japanese tilt when he stopped wrestling and grunted:

"Let me tell it."

"Hop to it," I consented, taking my hands away from him and stepping back.

He rubbed the wrist I had wrenched, scowling past me at the girl. He called her four unlovely names, the mildest of which was "a dumb twist," and told her:

"He was bluffing about throwing us in the can. You don't think old man Hambleton's hunting for newspaper space, do you?" That wasn't a bad guess.

He sat on the sofa again, still rubbing his wrist. The girl stayed on the other side of the room laughing at him through her teeth.

I said: "All right, roll it out, one of you."

"You've got it all," he muttered. "I glaumed that stuff last week when I was visiting Babe, knowing the story and hating to see a promising layout like that go to waste."

"What's Babe doing now?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"Is he still puffing them?"

"I don't know."

"Like hell you don't."

"I don't," he insisted. "If you know Babe you know you can't get anything out of him about what he's doing."

"How long have he and Sue been here?"

"About six months that I know of."

"Who's he mobbed up with?"

"I don't know. Any time Babe works with a mob he picks them up on the road and leaves them on the road."

"How's he fixed?"

"I don't know. There's always enough grub and liquor in the joint."

Half an hour of this convinced me that I wasn't going to get much information about my people here.

I went to the phone in the passageway and called the Agency. The boy on the switchboard told me MacMan was in the operatives' room. I asked to have him sent up to me, and went back to the living-room. Joe and Peggy took their heads apart when I came in.

MacMan arrived in less than ten minutes. I let him in and told him:

"This fellow says his name's Joe Wales, and the girl's supposed to be Peggy Carroll who lives upstairs in 421. We've got them cold for conspiracy to defraud, but I've made a deal with them. I'm going out to look at it now. Stay here with them, in this room. Nobody goes in or out, and nobody but

you gets to the phone. There's a fire-escape in front of the window. The window's locked now. I'd keep it that way. If the deal turns out O.K. we'll let them go, but if they cut up on you while I'm gone, there's no reason why you can't knock them around as much as you want."

MacMan nodded his hard round head and pulled a chair out between them and the door. I picked up my hat.

Joe Wales called:

"Hey, you're not going to uncover me to Babe, are you? That's got to be part of the deal."

"Not unless I have to."

"I'd just as leave stand the rap," he said, "I'd be safer in jail."

"I'll give you the best break I can," I promised, "but you'll have to take what's dealt you."

IV

Walking over to the St. Martin — only half a dozen blocks from Wales's place — I decided to go up against McCloor and the girl as a Continental op who suspected Babe of being in on a branch bank stick-up in Alameda the previous week. He hadn't been in on it — if the bank people had described half-correctly the men who had robbed them — so it wasn't likely my supposed suspicions would frighten him much. Clearing himself, he might give me some information I could use. The chief thing I wanted, of course, was a look at the girl, so I could report to her father that I had seen her. There was no reason for supposing that she and Babe knew her father was trying to keep an eye on her. Babe had a record. It was natural enough for sleuths to drop in now and then and try to hang something on him.

The St. Martin was a small three-story apartment house of red brick between two taller hotels. The vestibule register showed, *R. K. McCloor, 313*, as Wales and Peggy had told me.

I pushed the bell button. Nothing happened. Nothing happened any of the four times I pushed it. I pushed the button labeled *Manager*.

The door clicked open. I went indoors. A beefy woman in a pink-striped cotton dress that needed pressing stood in an apartment doorway just inside the street door.

"Some people named McCloor live here?" I asked.

"Three-thirteen," she said.

"Been living here long?"

She pursed her fat mouth, looked intently at me, hesitated, but finally said: "Since last June."

"What do you know about them?"

She balked at that, raising her chin and eyebrows.

I gave her my card. That was safe enough; it fit in with the pretext I intended using upstairs.

Her face, when she raised it from reading the card, was oily with curiosity.

"Come in here," she said in a husky whisper, backing through the doorway.

I followed her into her apartment. We sat on a Chesterfield and she whispered:

"What is it?"

"Maybe nothing." I kept my voice low, playing up to her theatricals. "He's done time for safe-burglary. I'm trying to get a line on him now, on the off chance that he might have been tied up in a recent job. I don't know that he was. He may be going straight for all I know." I took his photograph — front and profile, taken at Leavenworth — out of my pocket. "This him?"

She seized it eagerly, nodded, said, "Yes, that's him, all right," turned it over to read the description on the back, and repeated, "Yes, that's him all right."

"His wife is here with him?" I asked.

She nodded vigorously.

"I don't know her," I said. "What sort of looking girl is she?"

She described a girl who could have been Sue Hambleton. I couldn't show Sue's picture; that would have uncovered me if she and Babe heard about it.

I asked the woman what she knew about the McCloors. What she knew wasn't a great deal: paid their rent on time, kept irregular hours, had occasional drinking parties, quarreled a lot.

"Think they're in now?" I asked. "I got no answer on the bell."

"I don't know," she whispered. "I haven't seen either of them since night before last, when they had a fight."

"Much of a fight?"

"Not much worse than usual."

"Could you find out if they're in?" I asked.

She looked at me out of the ends of her eyes.

"I'm not going to make any trouble for you," I assured her. "But if they've blown I'd like to know it, and I reckon you would too."

"All right, I'll find out." She got up, patting a pocket in which keys jingled. "You wait here."

"I'll go as far as the third floor with you," I said, "and wait out of sight there."

"All right," she said reluctantly.

On the third floor, I remained by the elevator. She disappeared around a corner of the dim corridor, and presently a muffled electric bell rang. It rang three times. I heard her keys jingle and one of them grate in a lock. The lock clicked. I heard the doorknob rattle as she turned it.

Then a long moment of silence was ended by a scream that filled the corridor from wall to wall.

I jumped for the corner, swung around it, saw an open door ahead, went through it, and slammed the door shut behind me.

The scream had stopped.

I was in a small dark vestibule with three doors besides the one I had come through. One door was shut. One opened into a bathroom. I went to the other.

The fat manager stood just inside it, her round back to me. I pushed past her and saw what she was looking at.

Sue Hambleton, in pale yellow pajamas trimmed with black lace, was lying across a bed. She lay on her back. Her arms were stretched out over her head. One leg was bent under her, one stretched out so that its bare foot rested on the floor. That bare foot was whiter than a live foot could be. Her face was white as her foot, except for a mottled swollen area from the right eyebrow to the right cheek-bone and dark bruises on her throat.

"Phone the police," I told the woman, and began poking into corners, closets and drawers.

It was late afternoon when I returned to the Agency. I asked the file clerk to see if we had anything on Joe Wales and Peggy Carroll, and then went into the Old Man's office.

He put down some reports he had been reading, gave me a nodded invitation to sit down, and asked:

"You've seen her?"

"Yeah. She's dead."

The Old Man said, "Indeed," as if I had said it was raining, and smiled

with polite attentiveness while I told him about it — from the time I had rung Wales's bell until I had joined the fat manager in the dead girl's apartment.

"She had been knocked around some, was bruised on the face and neck," I wound up. "But that didn't kill her."

"You think she was murdered?" he asked, still smiling gently.

"I don't know. Doc Jordan says he thinks it could have been arsenic. He's hunting for it in her now. We found a funny thing in the joint. Some thick sheets of dark gray paper were stuck in a book — *The Count of Monte Cristo* — wrapped in a month-old newspaper and wedged into a dark corner between the stove and the kitchen wall."

"Ah, arsenical fly paper," the Old Man murmured. "The Maybrick-Seddons trick. Mashed in water, four to six grains of arsenic can be soaked out of a sheet — enough to kill two people."

I nodded, saying:

"I worked on one in Louisville in 1916. The mulatto janitor saw McCloor leaving at half-past nine yesterday morning. She was probably dead before that. Nobody's seen him since. Earlier in the morning the people in the next apartment had heard them talking, her groaning. But they had too many fights for the neighbors to pay much attention to that. The landlady told me they had a fight the night before that. The police are hunting for him."

"Did you tell the police who she was?"

"No. What do we do on that angle? We can't tell them about Wales without telling them all."

"I dare say the whole thing will have to come out," he said thoughtfully. "I'll wire New York."

I went out of his office. The file clerk gave me a couple of newspaper clippings. The first told me that, fifteen months ago, Joseph Wales, alias Holy Joe, had been arrested on the complaint of a farmer named Toomey that he had been taken for twenty-five hundred dollars on a phoney "Business Opportunity" by Wales and three other men. The second clipping said the case had been dropped when Toomey failed to appear against Wales in court — bought off in the customary manner by the return of part or all of his money. That was all our files held on Wales, and they had nothing on Peggy Carroll.

V

MacMan opened the door for me when I returned to Wales's apartment.

"Anything doing?" I asked him.

"Nothing — except they've been bellyaching a lot."

Wales came forward, asking eagerly:

"Satisfied now?"

The girl stood by the window, looking at me with anxious eyes.

I didn't say anything.

"Did you find her?" Wales asked, frowning. "She was where I told you?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well, then." Part of his frown went away. "That lets Peggy and me out, doesn't —" he broke off, ran his tongue over his lower lip, put a hand to his chin, asked sharply: "You didn't give them the tip-off on me, did you?"

I shook my head, no.

He took his hand from his chin and asked irritably:

"What's the matter with you, then? What are you looking like that for?"

Behind him the girl spoke bitterly.

"I knew damned well it would be like this," she said. "I knew damned well we weren't going to get out of it. Oh, what a smart guy you are!"

"Take Peggy into the kitchen, and shut both doors," I told MacMan. "Holy Joe and I are going to have a real heart-to-heart talk."

The girl went out willingly, but when MacMan was closing the door she put her head in again to tell Wales:

"I hope he busts you in the nose if you try to hold out on him."

MacMan shut the door.

"Your playmate seems to think you know something," I said.

Wales scowled at the door and grumbled: "She's more help to me than a broken leg." He turned his face to me, trying to make it look frank and friendly. "What do you want? I came clean with you before. What's the matter now?"

"What do you guess?"

He pulled his lips in between his teeth.

"What do you want to make me guess for?" he demanded. "I'm willing to play ball with you. But what can I do if you won't tell me what you want? I can't see inside your head."

"You'd get a kick out of it if you could."

He shook his head wearily and walked back to the sofa, sitting down bent forward, his hands together between his knees.

"All right," he sighed. "Take your time about asking me, I'll wait for you."

I went over and stood in front of him. I took his chin between my left thumb and fingers, raising his head and bending my own down until our noses were almost touching. I said:

"Where you stumbled, Joe, was in sending the telegram right after the murder."

"He's dead?" It popped out before his eyes had even had time to grow round and wide.

The question threw me off balance. I had to wrestle with my forehead to keep it from wrinkling, and I put too much calmness in my voice when I asked:

"Is who dead?"

"Who? How do I know? Who do you mean?"

"Who did you think I meant?" I insisted.

"How do I know? Oh, all right! Old man Hambleton, Sue's father."

"That's right," I said, and took my hand away from his chin.

"And he was murdered, you say?" He hadn't moved his face an inch from the position into which I had lifted it. "How?"

"Arsenic — fly paper."

"Arsenic fly paper." He looked thoughtful. "That's a funny one."

"Yeah, very funny. Where'd you go about buying some if you wanted it?"

"Buying it? I don't know. I haven't seen any since I was a kid. Nobody uses fly paper here in San Francisco anyway. There aren't enough flies."

"Somebody used some here," I said, "on Sue."

"Sue?" He jumped so that the sofa squeaked under him.

"Yeah. Murdered yesterday morning — arsenical fly paper."

"Both of them?" he asked incredulously.

"Both of who?"

"Her and her father?"

"Yeah."

He put his chin far down on his chest and rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other.

"Then I am in a hole," he said slowly.

"That's what," I cheerfully agreed. "Want to try talking yourself out of it?"

"Let me think."

I let him think, listening to the tick of the clock while he thought. Thinking brought drops of sweat out on his gray-white face. Presently he sat up straight, wiping his face with a fancily colored handkerchief.

"I'll talk," he said. "I've got to talk now. Sue was getting ready to ditch Babe. She and I were going away. She — Here, I'll show you."

He put his hand in his pocket and held out a folded sheet of thick notepaper to me. I took it and read:

Dear Joe: —

I can't stand this much longer — we've simply got to go soon. Babe beat me again tonight. Please, if you really love me, let's make it soon.

Sue

The handwriting was a nervous woman's, tall, angular, and piled up.

"That's why I made the play for Hambleton's grand," he said. "I've been shatting on my uppers for a couple of months, and when that letter came yesterday I just had to raise dough somehow to get her away. She wouldn't have stood for tapping her father though, so I tried to swing it without her knowing."

"When did you see her last?"

"Day before yesterday, the day she mailed that letter. Only I saw her in the afternoon — she was here — and she wrote it that night."

"Babe suspect what you were up to?"

"We didn't think he did. I don't know. He was jealous as hell all the time, whether he had any reason to be or not."

"How much reason did he have?"

Wales looked me straight in the eye and said:

"Sue was a good kid."

I said: "Well, she's been murdered."

He didn't say anything.

Day was darkening into evening. I went to the door and pressed the light button. I didn't lose sight of Holy Joe Wales while I was doing it.

As I took my finger away from the button, something clicked at the window. The click was loud and sharp.

I looked at the window.

A man crouched there on the fire-escape, looking in through glass and

lace curtain. He was a thick-featured dark man whose size identified him as Babe McCloor. The muzzle of a big black automatic was touching the glass in front of him. He had tapped the glass with it to catch our attention.

He had our attention.

There wasn't anything for me to do just then. I stood there and looked at him. I couldn't tell whether he was looking at me or at Wales. I could see him clearly enough, but the lace curtain spoiled my view of details like that. I imagined he wasn't neglecting either of us, and I didn't imagine the lace curtain hid much from him. He was closer to the curtain than we, and I had turned on the room's lights.

Wales, sitting dead still on the sofa, was looking at McCloor. Wales's face wore a peculiar, stiffly sullen expression. His eyes were sullen. He wasn't breathing.

McCloor flicked the nose of his pistol against the pane, and a triangular piece of glass fell out, tinkling apart on the floor. It didn't, I was afraid, make enough noise to alarm MacMan in the kitchen. There were two closed doors between here and there.

Wales looked at the broken pane and closed his eyes. He closed them slowly, little by little, exactly as if he were falling asleep. He kept his stiffly sullen blank face turned straight to the window.

McCloor shot him three times.

The bullets knocked Wales down on the sofa, back against the wall. Wales's eyes popped open, bulging. His lips crawled back over his teeth, leaving them naked to the gums. His tongue came out. Then his head fell down and he didn't move any more.

When McCloor jumped away from the window I jumped to it. While I was pushing the curtain aside, unlocking the window and raising it, I heard his feet land on the cement paving below.

MacMan flung the door open and came in, the girl at his heels.

"Take care of this," I ordered as I scrambled over the sill. "McCloor shot him."

VI

Wales's apartment was on the second floor. The fire-escape ended there with a counter-weighted iron ladder that a man's weight would swing down into a cement-paved court.

I went down as Babe McCloor had gone, swinging down on the ladder till

within dropping distance of the court, and then letting go.

There was only one street exit to the court. I took it.

A startled looking, smallish man was standing in the middle of the sidewalk close to the court, gaping at me as I dashed out.

I caught his arm, shook it.

"A big guy running." Maybe I yelled. "Where?"

He tried to say something, couldn't, and waved his arm at billboards standing across the front of a vacant lot on the other side of the street.

I forgot to say, "Thank you," in my hurry to get over there.

I got behind the billboards by crawling under them instead of going to either end, where there were openings. The lot was large enough and weedy enough to give cover to anybody who wanted to lie down and bushwhack a pursuer — even anybody as large as Babe McCloor.

While I considered that, I heard a dog barking at one corner of the lot. He could have been barking at a man who had run by. I ran to that corner of the lot. The dog was in a board-fenced backyard, at the corner of a narrow alley that ran from the lot to a street.

I chinned myself on the board fence, saw a wire-haired terrier alone in the yard, and ran down the alley while he was charging my part of the fence.

I put my gun back into my pocket before I left the alley for the street.

A small touring car was parked at the curb in front of a cigar store some fifteen feet from the alley. A policeman was talking to a slim dark-faced man in the cigar store doorway.

"The big fellow that come out of the alley a minute ago," I said. "Which way did he go?"

The policeman looked dumb. The slim man nodded his head down the street, said, "Down that way," and went on with his conversation.

I said, "Thanks," and went on down to the corner. There was a taxi phone there and two idle taxis. A block and a half below, a street car was going away.

"Did the big fellow who came down here a minute ago take a taxi or the street car?" I asked the two taxi chauffeurs who were leaning against one of the taxis.

The rattier looking one said:

"He didn't take a taxi."

I said:

"I'll take one. Catch that street car for me."

The street car was three blocks away before we got going. The street wasn't clear enough for me to see who got on and off it. We caught it when it stopped at Market Street.

"Follow along," I told the driver as I jumped out.

On the rear platform of the street car I looked through the glass. There were only eight or ten people aboard.

"There was a great big fellow got on at Hyde Street," I said to the conductor. "Where'd he get off?"

The conductor looked at the silver dollar I was turning over in my fingers and remembered that the big man got off at Taylor Street. That won the silver dollar.

I dropped off as the street car turned into Market Street. The taxi, close behind, slowed down, and its door swung open.

"Sixth and Mission," I said as I hopped in.

McCloor could have gone in any direction from Taylor Street. I had to guess. The best guess seemed to be that he would make for the other side of Market Street.

It was fairly dark by now. We had to go down to Fifth Street to get off Market, then over to Mission, and back up to Sixth. We got to Sixth Street without seeing McCloor. I couldn't see him on Sixth Street — either way from the crossing.

"On up to Ninth," I ordered, and while we rode told the driver what kind of man I was looking for.

We arrived at Ninth Street. No McCloor. I cursed and pushed my brains around.

The big man was a yegg. San Francisco was on fire for him. The yegg instinct would be to use a rattler to get away from trouble. The freight yards were in this end of town. Maybe he would be shifty enough to lie low instead of trying to powder. In that case, he probably hadn't crossed Market Street at all. If he stuck, there would still be a chance of picking him up tomorrow. If he was high-tailing, it was catch him now or not at all.

"Down to Harrison," I told the driver.

We went down to Harrison Street, and down Harrison to Third, up Bryant to Eighth, down Brannan to Third again, and over to Townsend — and we didn't see Babe McCloor.

"That's tough, that is," the driver sympathized as we stopped across the street from the Southern Pacific passenger station.

"I'm going over and look around in the station," I said. "Keep your eyes open while I'm gone."

When I told the copper in the station my trouble he introduced me to a couple of plain-clothes men who had been planted there to watch for McCloor. That had been done after Sue Hambleton's body was found. The shooting of Holy Joe Wales was news to them.

I went outside again and found my taxi in front of the door, its horn working over-time, but too asthmatically to be heard indoors. The ratty driver was excited.

"A guy like you said come up out of King Street just now and swung on a No. 16 car as it pulled away," he said.

"Going which way?"

"That-away," pointing southeast.

"Catch him," I said, jumping in.

The street car was out of sight around a bend in Third Street two blocks below. When we rounded the bend, the street car was slowing up, four blocks ahead. It hadn't slowed up very much when a man leaned far out and stepped off. He was a tall man, but didn't look tall on account of his shoulder spread. He didn't check his momentum, but used it to carry him across the sidewalk and out of sight.

We stopped where the man had left the car.

I gave the driver too much money and told him:

"Go back to Townsend Street and tell the copper in the station that I've chased Babe McCloor into the S. P. yards."

VII

I thought I was moving silently down between two strings of box cars, but I had gone less than twenty feet when a light flashed in my face and a sharp voice ordered:

"Stand still, you."

I stood still. Men came from between cars. One of them spoke my name, adding: "What are you doing here? Lost?" It was Harry Pebble, a police detective.

I stopped holding my breath and said:

"Hello, Harry. Looking for Babe?"

"Yes. We've been going over the rattlers."

"He's here. I just tailed him in from the street."

Pebble swore and snapped the light off.

"Watch, Harry," I advised. "Don't play with him. He's packing plenty of gun and he's cut down one boy tonight."

"I'll play with him," Pebble promised, and told one of the men with him to go over and warn those on the other side of the yard that McCloor was in, and then to ring for reinforcements.

"We'll just sit on the edge and hold him in till they come," he said.

That seemed a sensible way to play it. We spread out and waited. Once Pebble and I turned back a lanky bum who tried to slip into the yard between us, and one of the men below us picked up a shivering kid who was trying to slip out. Otherwise nothing happened until Lieutenant Duff arrived with a couple of carloads of coppers.

Most of our force went into a cordon around the yard. The rest of us went through the yard in small groups, working it over car by car. We picked up a few hoboes that Pebble and his men had missed earlier, but we didn't find McCloor.

We didn't find any trace of him until somebody stumbled over a railroad bull huddled in the shadow of a gondola. It took a couple of minutes to bring him to, and he couldn't talk then. His jaw was broken. But when we asked if McCloor had slugged him, he nodded, and when we asked in which direction McCloor had been headed, he moved a feeble hand to the east.

We went over and searched the Santa Fe yards.

We didn't find McCloor.

VIII

I rode up to the Hall of Justice with Duff. MacMan was in the captain of detectives' office with three or four police sleuths.

"Wales die?" I asked.

"Yep."

"Say anything before he went?"

"He was gone before you were through the window."

"You held on to the girl?"

"She's here."

"She say anything?"

"We were waiting for you before we tapped her," detective-sergeant O'Gar said, "not knowing the angle on her."

"Let's have her in. I haven't had any dinner yet. How about the autopsy on Sue Hambleton?"

"Chronic arsenic poisoning."

"Chronic? That means it was fed to her little by little, and not in a lump?"

"Uh-huh. From what he found in her kidney, intestines, liver, stomach and blood, Jordan figures there was less than a grain of it in her. That wouldn't be enough to knock her off. But he says he found arsenic in the tips of her hair, and she'd have to be given some at least a month ago for it to have worked out that far."

"Any chance that it wasn't arsenic that killed her?"

"Not unless Jordan's a bum doctor."

A policewoman came in with Peggy Carroll.

The blonde girl was tired. Her eyelids, mouth corners and body drooped, and when I pushed a chair out toward her she sagged down in it.

O'Gar ducked his grizzled bullet head at me.

"Now, Peggy," I said, "tell us where you fit into this mess."

"I don't fit into it." She didn't look up. Her voice was tired. "Joe dragged me into it. He told you."

"You his girl?"

"If you want to call it that," she admitted.

"You jealous?"

"What," she asked, looking up at me, her face puzzled, "has that got to do with it?"

"Sue Hambleton was getting ready to go away with him when she was murdered."

The girl sat up straight in the chair and said deliberately:

"I swear to God I didn't know she was murdered."

"But you did know she was dead," I said positively.

"I didn't," she replied just as positively.

I nudged O'Gar with my elbow. He pushed his undershot jaw at her and barked:

"What are you trying to give us? You knew she was dead. How could you kill her without knowing it?"

While she looked at him I waved the others in. They crowded close around her and took up the chorus of the sergeant's song. She was barked,

roared, and snarled at plenty in the next few minutes.

The instant she stopped trying to talk back to them I cut in again.

"Wait," I said, very earnestly. "Maybe she didn't kill her."

"The hell she didn't," O'Gar stormed, holding the center of the stage so the others could move away from the girl without their retreat seeming too artificial. "Do you mean to tell me this baby —"

"I didn't say she didn't," I remonstrated. "I said maybe she didn't."

"Then who did?"

I passed the question to the girl: "Who did?"

"Babe," she said immediately.

O'Gar snorted to make her think he didn't believe her.

I asked, as if I were honestly perplexed:

"How do you know that if you didn't know she was dead?"

"It stands to reason he did," she said. "Anybody can see that. He found out she was going away with Joe, so he killed her and then came to Joe's and killed him. That's just exactly what Babe would do when he found it out."

"Yeah? How long have *you* known they were going away together?"

"Since they decided to. Joe told me a month or two ago."

"And you didn't mind?"

"You've got this all wrong," she said. "Of course I didn't mind. I was being cut in on it. You know her father had the bees. That's what Joe was after. She didn't mean anything to him but an in to the old man's pockets. And I was to get my dib. And you needn't think I was crazy enough about Joe or anybody else to step off in the air for them. Babe got next and fixed the pair of them. That's a cinch."

"Yeah? How do you figure Babe would kill her?"

"That guy? You don't think he'd —"

"I mean, how would he go about killing her?"

"Oh!" She shrugged. "With his hands, likely as not."

"Once he'd made up his mind to do it, he'd do it quick and violent?" I suggested.

"That would be Babe," she agreed.

"But you can't see him slow-poisoning her — spreading it out over a month?"

Worry came into the girl's blue eyes. She put her lower lip between her teeth, then said slowly:

"No, I can't see him doing it that way. Not Babe."

"Who can you see doing it that way?"

She opened her eyes wide, asking:

"You mean Joe?"

I didn't say anything.

"Joe might have," she said persuasively. "God only knows what he'd want to do it for, why he'd want to get rid of the kind of meal ticket she was going to be. But you couldn't always guess what he was getting at. He pulled plenty of dumb ones. He was too slick without being smart. If he was going to kill her, though, that would be about the way he'd go about it."

"Were he and Babe friendly?"

"No."

"Did he go to Babe's much?"

"Not at all that I know about. He was too leery of Babe to take a chance on being caught there. That's why I moved upstairs, so Sue could come over to our place to see him."

"Then how could Joe have hidden the fly paper he poisoned her with in her apartment?"

"Fly paper!" Her bewilderment seemed honest enough.

"Show it to her," I told O'Gar.

He got a sheet from the desk and held it close to the girl's face.

She stared at it for a moment and then jumped up and grabbed my arm with both hands.

"I didn't know what it was," she said excitedly. "Joe had some a couple of months ago. He was looking at it when I came in. I asked him what it was for, and he smiled that wisenheimer smile of his and said, 'You make angels out of it,' and wrapped it up again and put it in his pocket. I didn't pay much attention to him: he was always fooling with some kind of tricks that were supposed to make him wealthy, but never did."

"Ever see it again?"

"No."

"Did you know Sue very well?"

"I didn't know her at all. I never even saw her. I used to keep out of the way so I wouldn't gum Joe's play with her."

"But you know Babe?"

"Yes, I've been on a couple of parties where he was. That's all I know him."

"Who killed Sue?"

"Joe," she said. "Didn't he have that paper you say she was killed with?"

"Why did he kill her?"

"I don't know. He pulled some awful dumb tricks sometimes."

"You didn't kill her?"

"No, no, no!"

I jerked the corner of my mouth at O'Gar.

"You're a liar," he bawled, shaking the fly paper in her face. "You killed her." The rest of the team closed in, throwing accusations at her. They kept it up until she was groggy and the policewoman beginning to look worried.

Then I said angrily:

"All right. Throw her in a cell and let her think it over." To her: "You know what you told Joe this afternoon: this is no time to dummy up. Do a lot of thinking tonight."

"Honest to God I didn't kill her," she said.

I turned my back to her. The policewoman took her away.

"Ho-hum," O'Gar yawned. "We gave her a pretty good ride at that, for a short one."

"Not bad," I agreed. "If anybody else looked likely, I'd say she didn't kill Sue. But if she's telling the truth, then Holy Joe did it. And why should he poison the goose that was going to lay nice yellow eggs for him? And how and why did he cache the poison in their apartment? Babe had the motive, but damned if he looks like a slow-poisoner to me. You can't tell, though; he and Holy Joe could even have been working together on it."

"Could," Duff said. "But it takes a lot of imagination to get that one down. Anyway you twist it, Peggy's our best bet so far. Go up against her again, hard, in the morning?"

"Yeah," I said. "And we've got to find Babe."

The others had had dinner. MacMan and I went out and got ours. When we returned to the detective bureau an hour later it was practically deserted of the regular operatives.

"All gone to Pier 42 on a tip that McCloor's there," Steve Ward told us.

"How long ago?"

"Ten minutes."

MacMan and I got a taxi and set out for Pier 42. We didn't get to Pier 42.

On First Street, half a block from the Embarcadero, the taxi suddenly shrieked and slid to a halt.

"What —?" I began, and saw a man standing in front of the machine. He

was a big man with a big gun. "Babe," I grunted, and put my hand on MacMan's arm to keep him from getting his gun out.

"Take me to —" McCloor was saying to the frightened driver when he saw us. He came around to my side and pulled the door open, holding the gun on us.

He had no hat. His hair was wet, plastered to his head. Little streams of water trickled down from it. His clothes were dripping wet.

He looked surprised at us and ordered:

"Get out."

As we got out he growled at the driver:

"What the hell you got your flag up for if you had fares?"

The driver wasn't there. He had hopped out the other side and was scooting away down the street. McCloor cursed him and poked his gun at me, growling:

"Go on, beat it."

Apparently he hadn't recognized me. The light here wasn't good, and I had a hat on now. He had seen me for only a few seconds in Wales's room.

I stepped aside. MacMan moved to the other side.

McCloor took a backward step to keep us from getting him between us and started an angry word.

MacMan threw himself on McCloor's gun arm.

I socked McCloor's jaw with my fist. I might just as well have hit somebody else for all it seemed to bother him.

He swept me out of his way and pasted MacMan in the mouth. MacMan fell back till the taxi stopped him, spat out a tooth, and came back for more.

I was trying to climb up McCloor's left side.

MacMan came in on his right, failed to dodge a chop of the gun, caught it square on the top of the noodle, and went down hard. He stayed down.

I kicked McCloor's ankle, but couldn't get his foot from under him. I rammed my right fist into the small of his back and got a left-handful of his wet hair, swinging on it. He shook his head, dragging me off my feet.

He punched me in the side and I could feel my ribs and guts flattening together like leaves in a book.

I swung my fist against the back of his neck. That bothered him. He made a rumbling noise down in his chest, crunched my shoulder in his left hand, and chopped at me with the gun in his right.

I kicked him somewhere and punched his neck again.

Down the street, at the Embarcadero, a police whistle was blowing. Men were running up First Street toward us.

McCloor snorted like a locomotive and threw me away from him. I didn't want to go. I tried to hang on. He threw me away from him and ran up the street.

I scrambled up and ran after him, dragging my gun out.

At the first corner he stopped to squirt metal at me — three shots. I squirted one at him. None of the four connected.

He disappeared around the corner. I swung wide around it, to make him miss if he were flattened to the wall waiting for me. He wasn't. He was a hundred feet ahead, going into a space between two warehouses. I went in after him, and out after him at the other end, making better time with my hundred and ninety pounds than he was making with his two-fifty.

He crossed a street, turning up, away from the waterfront. There was a light on the corner. When I came into its glare he wheeled and leveled his gun at me. I didn't hear it click, but I knew it had when he threw it at me. The gun went past with a couple of feet to spare and raised hell against a door behind me.

McCloor turned and ran up the street. I ran up the street after him.

I put a bullet past him to let the others know where we were. At the next corner he started to turn to the left, changed his mind, and went straight on.

I sprinted, cutting the distance between us to forty or fifty feet, and yelped:

"Stop or I'll drop you."

He jumped sidewise into a narrow alley.

I passed it on the jump, saw he wasn't waiting for me, and went in. Enough light came in from the street to let us see each other and our surroundings. The alley was blind — walled on each side and at the other end by tall concrete buildings with steel-shuttered windows and doors.

McCloor faced me, less than twenty feet away. His jaw stuck out. His arms curved down free of his sides. His shoulders were bunched.

"Put them up," I ordered, holding my gun level.

"Get out of my way, little man," he grumbled, taking a stiff-legged step toward me. "I'll eat you up."

"Keep coming," I said, "and I'll put you down."

"Try it." He took another step, crouching a little. "I can still get to you *with* slugs in me."

"Not where I'll put them." I was wordy, trying to talk him into waiting till the others came up. I didn't want to have to kill him. We could have done that from the taxi. "I'm no Annie Oakley, but if I can't pop your kneecaps with two shots at this distance, you're welcome to me. And if you think smashed kneecaps are a lot of fun, give it a whirl."

"Hell with that," he said and charged.

I shot his right knee.

He lurched toward me.

I shot his left knee.

He tumbled down.

"You would have it," I complained.

He twisted around, and with his arms pushed himself into a sitting position facing me.

"I didn't think you had sense enough to do it," he said through his teeth.

IX

I talked to McCloor in the hospital. He lay on his back in bed with a couple of pillows slanting his head up. The skin was pale and tight around his mouth and eyes, but there was nothing else to show he was in pain.

"You sure devastated me, bo," he said when I came in.

"Sorry," I said, "but —"

"I ain't beefing. I asked for it."

"Why'd you kill Holy Joe?" I asked, off-hand, as I pulled a chair up beside the bed.

"Uh-uh — you're tooting the wrong wringer."

I laughed and told him I was the man in the room with Joe when it happened.

McCloor grinned and said:

"I thought I'd seen you somewheres before. So that's where it was. I didn't pay no attention to your mug, just so your hands didn't move."

"Why'd you kill him?"

He pursed his lips, screwed up his eyes at me, thought something over, and said:

"He killed a broad I knew."

"He killed Sue Hambleton?" I asked.

He studied my face a while before he replied: "Yep."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Hell," he said, "I don't have to. Sue told me. Give me a butt."

I gave him a cigarette, held a lighter under it, and objected:

"That doesn't exactly fit in with other things I know. Just what happened and what did she say? You might start back with the night you gave her the goog."

He looked thoughtful, letting smoke sneak slowly out of his nose, then said:

"I hadn't ought to hit her in the eye, that's a fact. But, see, she had been out all afternoon and wouldn't tell me where she'd been, and we had a row over it. What's this — Thursday morning? That was Monday, then. After the row I went out and spent the night in a dump over on Army Street. I got home about seven the next morning. Sue was sick as hell, but she wouldn't let me get a croaker for her. That was kind of funny, because she was scared stiff."

McCloor scratched his head meditatively and suddenly drew in a great lungful of smoke, practically eating up the rest of the cigarette. He let the smoke leak out of mouth and nose together, looking dully through the cloud at me. Then he said bruskly:

"Well, she went under. But before she went she told me she'd been poisoned by Holy Joe."

"She say how he'd given it to her?"

McCloor shook his head.

"I'd been asking her what was the matter, and not getting anything out of her. Then she starts whining that she's poisoned. 'I'm poisoned, Babe,' she whines. 'Arsenic. That damned Holy Joe,' she says. Then she won't say anything else, and it's not a hell of a while after that that she kicks off."

"Yeah? Then what'd you do?"

"I went gunning for Holy Joe. I knew him but didn't know where he jungled up, and didn't find out till yesterday. You was there when I came. You know about that. I had picked up a boiler and parked it over on Turk Street, for the getaway. When I got back to it, there was a copper standing close to it. I figured he might have spotted it as a hot one and was waiting to see who came for it, so I let it alone, and caught a street car instead, and cut for the yards. Down there I ran into a whole flock of hammer and saws and had to go overboard in China Basin, swimming up to a pier, being ranked again by a watchman there, swimming off to another, and finally getting through the line only to run into another bad break. I wouldn't of

flagged that taxi if the *For Hire* flag hadn't been up."

"You knew Sue was planning to take a run-out on you with Joe?"

"I don't know it yet," he said. "I knew damned well she was cheating on me, but I didn't know who with."

"What would you have done if you had known that?" I asked.

"Me?" He grinned wolfishly. "Just what I did."

"Killed the pair of them." I said.

He rubbed his lower lip with a thumb and asked calmly:

"You think I killed Sue?"

"You did."

"Serves me right," he said. "I must be getting simple in my old age. What the hell am I doing barbering with a lousy dick? That never got nobody nothing but grief. Well, you might just as well take it on the heel and toe now, my lad. I'm through spitting."

And he was. I couldn't get another word out of him.

X

The Old Man sat listening to me, tapping his desk lightly with the point of a long yellow pencil, staring past me with mild blue, rimless-spectacled, eyes. When I had brought my story up to date, he asked pleasantly:

"How is MacMan?"

"He lost two teeth, but his skull wasn't cracked. He'll be out in a couple of days."

The Old Man nodded and asked:

"What remains to be done?"

"Nothing. We can put Peggy Carroll on the mat again, but it's not likely we'll squeeze much more out of her. Outside of that, the returns are pretty well all in."

"And what do you make of it?"

I squirmed in my chair and said: "Suicide."

The Old Man smiled at me, politely but skeptically.

"I don't like it either," I grumbled. "And I'm not ready to write it in a report yet. But that's the only total that what we've got will add up to. That fly paper was hidden behind the kitchen stove. Nobody would be crazy enough to try to hide something from a woman in her own kitchen like that. But the woman might hide it there.

"According to Peggy, Holy Joe had the fly paper. If Sue hid it, she got it

from him. For what? They were planning to go away together, and were only waiting till Joe, who was on the nut, raised enough dough. Maybe they were afraid of Babe, and had the poison there to slip him if he tumbled to their plan before they went. Maybe they meant to slip it to him before they went anyway.

"When I started talking to Holy Joe about murder, he thought Babe was the one who had been bumped off. He was surprised, maybe, but as if he was surprised that it had happened so soon. He was more surprised when he heard that Sue had died too, but even then he wasn't so surprised as when he saw McCloor alive at the window.

"She died cursing Holy Joe, and she knew she was poisoned, and she wouldn't let McCloor get a doctor. Can't that mean that she had turned against Joe, and had taken the poison herself instead of feeding it to Babe? The poison was hidden from Babe. But even if he found it, I can't figure him as a poisoner. He's too rough. Unless he caught her trying to poison him and made her swallow the stuff. But that doesn't account for the month-old arsenic in her hair."

"Does your suicide hypothesis take care of that?" the Old Man asked.

"It could," I said. "Don't be kicking holes in my theory. It's got enough as it stands. But if she committed suicide this time, there's no reason why she couldn't have tried it once before — say after a quarrel with Joe a month ago — and failed to bring it off. That would have put the arsenic in her. There's no real proof that she took any between a month ago and day before yesterday."

"No real proof," the Old Man protested mildly, "except the autopsy's finding — chronic poisoning."

I was never one to let experts' guesses stand in my way. I said:

"They base that on the small amount of arsenic they found in her remains — less than a fatal dose. And the amount they find in your stomach after you're dead depends on how much you vomit before you die."

The Old Man smiled benevolently at me and asked:

"But you're not, you say, ready to write this theory into a report? Meanwhile what do you propose doing?"

"If there's nothing else on tap, I'm going home, fumigate my brains with Fatimas, and try to get this thing straightened out in my head. I think I'll get a copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and run through it. I haven't read it since I was a kid. It looks like the book was wrapped up with the fly paper

to make a bundle large enough to wedge tightly between the wall and stove, so it wouldn't fall down. But there might be something in the book. I'll see anyway."

"I did that last night," the Old Man murmured.

I asked: "And?"

He took a book from his desk drawer, opened it where a slip of paper marked a place, and held it out to me, one pink finger marking a paragraph.

"Suppose you were to take a millegramme of this poison the first day, two millegrammes the second day, and so on. Well, at the end of ten days you would have taken a centigramme: at the end of twenty days, increasing another millegramme, you would have taken three hundred centigrammes; that is to say, a dose you would support without inconvenience, and which would be very dangerous for any other person who had not taken the same precautions as yourself. Well, then, at the end of the month, when drinking water from the same carafe, you would kill the person who had drunk this water, without your perceiving otherwise than from slight inconvenience that there was any poisonous substance mingled with the water."

"That does it," I said. "That does it. They were afraid to go away without killing Babe, too certain he'd come after them. She tried to make herself immune from arsenic poisoning by getting her body accustomed to it, taking steadily increasing doses, so when she slipped the big shot in Babe's food she could eat it with him without danger. She'd be taken sick, but wouldn't die, and the police couldn't hang his death on her because she too had eaten the poisoned food.

"That clicks. After the row Monday night, when she wrote Joe the note urging him to make the getaway soon, she tried to hurry up her immunity, and increased her preparatory doses too quickly, took too large a shot. That's why she cursed Joe at the end: it was his plan."

"Possibly she overdosed herself in an attempt to speed it along," the Old Man agreed, "but not necessarily. There are people who can cultivate an ability to take large doses of arsenic without trouble, but it seems to be a sort of natural gift with them, a matter of some constitutional peculiarity. Ordinarily, any one who tried it would do what Sue Hambleton did — slowly poison themselves until the cumulative effect was strong enough to cause death."

Babe McCloor was hanged, for killing Holy Joe Wales, six months later.

Introducing "the incredible" Rowland Hern, a detective you probably never heard of, in a story which has never been published in America. A discovery by your Editors for which we think you will thank us.

THE COLLECTOR OF CURIOSITIES

by NICHOLAS OLDE

"CLUES," said Rowland Hern, "require expert handling. They are always dangerous weapons in the hands of the amateur."

It was a Saturday morning, and we were walking along Bishopsgate in the direction of Hern's office.

"For instance," he continued, "look at that man on the other side of the road, with the red rose and the black bag. What do you make of him?"

The man was dawdling along the pavement in the same direction as ourselves. He stopped every few paces to look into a shop window or across the street.

"The only thing," I said, "that I can deduce from his behaviour is that he has plenty of time to spare. Even an amateur can handle so simple a problem as that."

Hern smiled. "Personally," he said, "I draw the very opposite conclusion. He is, actually, in the deuce of a hurry. Let us test it."

We crossed the road and Hern, raising his hat, accosted the stranger politely.

"I perceive, sir," he said, "that you are in a hurry."

"I am, indeed, sir," answered the stranger. "I am in such a hurry that I cannot afford to overtake that frightful bore, old Polperro, who is just in front. If I do, he will buttonhole me and keep me for an hour. Ah, thank goodness he has turned the corner.

"But," he continued, "I should esteem it a great favour if you would inform me as to how, in view of the fact that I was not hurrying, you succeeded in discovering the fact that I was in a hurry."

"That," answered Hern, "was simple. You see, you were frowning. A man who dawdles in order to pass the time pleasantly does not frown. Clearly you were frowning because you had to dawdle. The inference was obvious."

"That is true," said the stranger. "I was, in a sense, dawdling just because

I was in a hurry. But indeed, sir, I doubt whether the famous detective whom I am now going to visit could have done better. His name is Rowland Hern; and this, I think, is the door of his office."

"As you say," said Hern, "he could have done no better. And, as you say, this is my office."

We all three laughed at the coincidence and were soon comfortably seated in Hern's room, listening to the strange tale that the stranger was telling.

"My name," he began, "is Bernard Bournemouth, and I live at Potter Place on Hampstead Heath.

"I have been," he continued, "for a considerable number of years a collector of curiosities. Many of my specimens are priceless; and all of them have what I consider the essential quality of curiosities: that is to say, they are curious. My collection is, therefore, not only a valuable collection but a curious collection.

"And yet, although it is far more valuable, it is not, in some respects, so curious as the collection which I have here"; and, picking up the black bag that he had put beside him on the floor, he emptied its contents on to the table.

Hern sifted over with his fingers an extraordinary assortment of miscellaneous small objects that lay upon the cloth. "This certainly is a curious collection, Mr. Bournemouth," he said.

"And yet," said Bournemouth, "even this collection is hardly so curious in itself as in the way in which I collected it; or, perhaps I ought to say, the way in which it collected itself."

"Please to tell us all about it," said Hern.

"These objects," said Bournemouth, "I have acquired at the rate of one a day. I have not bought any of them — although I am not sure that, legally, I have not stolen all of them. That is to say I have found them. That, in itself, is, you will admit, a most curious way in which to collect specimens. But even that is hardly so curious as the curious places in which I have found them. This tape measure, for instance, I found in one of my shoes when I put it on. The billiard ball was actually in my trouser pocket; and both those bootlaces, and several of the other things, were in my bed when I retired. That whistle I found concealed in my bread at dinner one night; and that earring was in the finger of one of my gloves. In fact I have found each one of them in a most unexpected place, and one, too, in which it could not possibly have been put by accident."

"And also," added Hern, "where you could not possibly fail to find it."

"That is true," said our visitor; "though I had not thought of it in that light."

"In what order did you find these things?" asked Hern.

"That, I regret to say," said Bournemouth, "I cannot tell you. At first I merely thought that someone was playing a foolish practical joke; and, although I kept everything, I can only tell you that the first of them was this tape measure;" and he pointed to a tape such as women use in dressmaking; "the second this ring;" and he picked up an antique ring set with opals; "and the third, I believe, was this Christmas-tree flag;" and he indicated a tiny cardboard Union Jack.

"However," he continued, "after I had found this second opal ring in my pocket, I began to wonder whether anyone might be attempting to compromise me, possibly with a view to blackmail; and, as I realised that I should have handed over my finds to the police from the first, I refrained from going to them at that stage. This morning I found, suspended over the head of my bed, almost touching my face, this tiny silver dagger. The ominous nature of the object itself and the ominous situation in which I found it had such a terrifying effect upon me that I left home in hot haste to consult you."

"You are, it is clear," said Hern, "of a somewhat nervous temperament. Were these bootlaces found together or separately?"

"I found them separately but on successive nights," said Bournemouth. "And now, what do you advise?"

"My advice," said Hern, "is this. Go straight to the Hampstead police-station and ask for Inspector Turtle. He is one of the smartest detectives in the force. You might as well," he added, "call his attention to the length of the tape measure and to the fact that the billiard ball is ivory and not composition. Before you pack these things away in your bag I will ask my friend to jot down a list of them so that I may refresh my memory if need be."

When I had done this the collector of curiosities put everything back into his bag and rose to go.

"Take great care, Mr. Bournemouth," said Hern, as he opened the door, "of your curious collection."

After he had gone, Hern studied the list that I had made for about a quarter of an hour: then he put it by with a laugh and began to read his letters.

He did not mention the case again even when, in the afternoon, we were on our way towards his flat at Highgate; and I knew him too well to broach

the subject. But at about ten o'clock that night Inspector Turtle was announced and was shown into Hern's study.

"I must thank you, sir," he began, "for sending me a most interesting case; and also for your hint about the yard-measure. That started me on the right tack without waste of time; especially since Mr. Bournemouth was able to tell me the order in which he made the first three finds. I have never had less trouble with a code. There is one point that perhaps you did not notice in relation to the two bootlaces. These were found on successive nights, and they obviously represent Mr. Bournemouth's initials, 'B. B.' "

"No," said Hern. "That point certainly did not strike me."

"This," continued the inspector, producing a sheet of paper, "is, according to my interpretation, the order in which the various articles were found, and the solution of the problem."

On the paper was written:

Yard-measure.
Opal ring.
Union Jack.
Marble.
Idol.
Nail.
Dice-box.
Ivory Billiard Ball.
Opal ring.
Whistle.
Earring.
Bootlace.
Bootlace.
Dagger.

and underneath was the sentence:

YOU MIND: I OWE B.B. D——.

"I expect," said Inspector Turtle, "that our friend will find the other ear-ring to-night or to-morrow morning, and that the last word will be DEATH."

"Death generally is the last word, in one sense," said Hern, and began to write on a sheet of paper.

"Your solution is ingenious," he said presently. "I thought that you would get on to the right tack quickly with my hints. The code is certainly a simple

one and easy to read, because it was meant to be easily read; and I am not sure that you have not shown a little more ingenuity than it required.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Turtle, that such objects as, say, lamps, looking-glasses and Limburger cheeses, are not easy things to conceal in a pocket or a bed or a glove or even to drop through a minute hole in a ceiling; while others of suitable dimensions, such as lozenges, lemons and lorgnettes, for example, may often be difficult to come by in a particular house at a particular moment?

"Bootlaces, on the other hand, are not bulky articles, and they can nearly always be obtained without more exertion than is involved in the mere act of stooping.

"At any rate I do not like your warning. It is an odd sentence and does not ring true to me. The first two words would waste a whole week and are more suggestive of a nursemaid than a murderer. I think that the message, as you read it, is even more curious than the manner in which it was delivered."

"You think, then," said the Inspector, "that the bootlaces stand for the letter 'L.' In that case the author of the message could, surely, have got a piece of lace which could have been hidden just as easily."

"Yes," said Hern, "so easily that Bournemouth might not have found it in his bed. What do you think of this suggestion?" He laid a sheet of paper on the table. On it was written:

YOU DEMON I WILL D——.

"Certainly," said Turtle, "that does ring truer than mine. I suppose the last part will read, 'DO YOU TO DEATH.' But that certainly does not look as if time was a consideration — it gives Bournemouth another eleven days."

"It might be, 'DO YOU IN,' " said Hern, "which would only give him six. But I think that he will only get two more specimens to add to that collection."

"But that does not fit in with your own solution!" exclaimed Turtle.

"You have not seen my solution," said Hern. "I was only showing you that your conclusions might be wrong, as conclusions so often are that have been reached with a minimum of trouble. Here is my solution," and he wrote on the paper:

YOU WILL DIE MOND——.

"Let us telephone to our friend," he continued, "and ask whether he has found another curiosity yet."

Turtle went to the telephone. "He has found an awl thrust through the

left side of his evening shirt front," he announced a few seconds later.

"It will end as it began," said Hern, "with a yard-measure. Two yards for his coffin! I hope that he won't die of fright. However," he added, "you know as much now as I do; so you will know what steps to take."

It was on the Monday that we next heard news of the collector of curiosities. Inspector Turtle called while we were having tea.

"Well," asked Hern, "what is your news?"

"I think," answered the inspector, "that there is no doubt as to the author of that curious warning. It was obvious to me from the first that only a member of the household could have facilities for placing all those curious objects in all those curious places. Accordingly I made the very fullest inquiries with regard to every member of Bournemouth's establishment. My task was rendered the easier by the discovery that every one of his servants has been in his employment for several years — with one exception. That exception is the footman. He had been there only a few days when not only Bournemouth and his wife but the servants themselves began to miss money and valuables, the circumstances being such as to point almost unmistakably to this particular man, James Grime. But, although he was morally certain as to Grime's guilt, Bournemouth felt a doubt as to whether the evidence was sufficiently conclusive to justify a prosecution. He therefore gave the man notice; and it is a significant fact that that notice expires to-day, Monday.

"Further, my enquiries have revealed that, of all the persons under Bournemouth's roof, Grime is the only one who was in the house, on each and every occasion, at the times at which these articles must have been put in the places in which they were found. Each one of the others, from the secretary and the housekeeper down to the scullery-maid and boot-boy, has a clear alibi as regards at least one of the vital periods. If further corroboration is needed, it is to be found in a study of Grime's character.

"He is, it appears, possessed of a most violent and sinister nature and has, since he was first told that he must go, terrified the other servants by such a diabolical ferocity of demeanour that they have literally gone in fear of their lives; and this fear has been, no doubt, intensified by the fact that Grime is a man of gigantic stature.

"Bournemouth himself is, as you have seen, a very nervous man and he has almost eagerly acceded to my suggestion that he and his wife should leave Potter Place for a time, keeping their whereabouts dark, until I have

sufficient evidence to enable me to lay Grime by the heels. The servants, who, as I say, were almost equally frightened, have been sent to their homes with board wages; but, in order that Potter Place should not be left entirely unprotected, for its situation is very isolated and its contents almost invaluable, the secretary, George Goodenough, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Merridew, a charming old lady, are remaining in it; both having assured Bournemouth that they are not at all afraid of Grime's threats of violence. They have both been in Bournemouth's service for nearly ten years; and Goodenough is so devoted to the care of the famous Bournemouth Collection, in the acquisition and arrangement of which he has ably assisted his employer, that I think that he would really sooner face death than consent to be separated from it. He is a real connoisseur and as great an expert as Bournemouth himself. In the meantime all that can be done is to guard Bournemouth and watch Grime and wait for the next move."

"I think," said Hern, "that the next move will be made tonight. I will call and see you at the police-station later."

It was a beautiful summer evening as we walked over Hampstead Heath towards Potter Place; and dusk had already fallen before we entered the stately avenue.

Hern had stuffed my pockets and his own with strong cord, and we were both armed with six-inch Webley pistols.

We had only traversed half the distance from the gates to the house when we heard the sound of a motor coming behind us.

Hern pulled me back amongst the bushes.

Presently a lumbering lorry came along, and we leaped out and on to the step, clapping our pistols against the driver's head. We made him climb into the back of the van and there we corded him securely and left him helpless on the floor with myself as guard over him.

Hern jumped into the driver's seat and drove on towards the house. The front door was partially opened at our hoot. Deftly Hern thrust his foot into the crack, and forced his way through, holding his pistol to the head of an elderly man who stood inside. I saw that he wore an overcoat and hat, and that the hall was filled with packing-cases and luggage. The whole of this was transferred to the lorry by our second captive under the urgent compulsion of Hern's weapon. Then he too was corded up, like the driver and the packing-cases, and we drove off.

Presently the lorry pulled up, and, looking out, I saw the blue lamp of a

police-station: and a constable ran down the steps and took charge of the vehicle and our prisoners.

Hern and I went inside and, in his office, we found Inspector Turtle with Mr. Bournemouth.

"Well, sir," began the former, "I think that my suspicions have been amply justified. I have had very careful enquiries made as to the antecedents of James Grime, which, I find, is only one *alias* of many. He has already, it appears, served three sentences for petty larceny, two for inflicting grievous bodily harm, and one for attempted murder. In the last case it was not his fault that it did not become a hanging matter.

"So I think," he concluded, "that I have proved, beyond the shadow of doubt, that it was Grime who threatened to kill Mr. Bournemouth."

"Oh dear no," said Hern. "You have proved, beyond the shadow of doubt, the exact opposite."

"But, good gracious," they both protested, "why do you say that?"

"You see," said Hern, "Grime is the sort of man who might really murder Mr. Bournemouth, and would, no doubt, like to murder him (pray do not be nervous, Mr. Bournemouth). But, if that had been his intention, he would have done it while he had the opportunity: that is, while he was in Mr. Bournemouth's service. He could so easily have hidden a final curiosity in Mr. Bournemouth's food or drink. Then it would have been found in the most curious place of all: I mean in Mr. Bournemouth's corpse (forgive me, Mr. Bournemouth, I did not intend to startle you). Now if I wanted to murder anyone I should certainly not tell him that I was going to murder him: if I wanted to rob him I should certainly not tell him that I was going to rob him; but, in that case, I might tell him that I was going to kill him in order to frighten him out of the way — especially if he was a naturally nervous person. You will remember, perhaps, Mr. Bournemouth, that I did not advise you to take care of your life; but I did advise you to take care of your curious collection."

"I have it with me safe in my bag," said Bournemouth.

"You have not," answered Hern, "I have it outside, safe in a van, with a policeman guarding it.

"You forgot, you see, for the moment," he continued, "that you had two curious collections; and the valueless one, which you imagined to be the precursor of death, occupied your mind to the exclusion of the valuable one. The authors of that curious warning were not potential murderers, like

Grime, nor petty pilferers, like Grime. No one wanted that collection of oddments that you have in your bag; and no one wanted your life. The Sadgroves never kill. They would consider it inartistic."

"The Sadgroves!" exclaimed the inspector with a look of amazement.

"Who are the Sadgroves?" asked Bournemouth, puzzled.

"They are two brothers, Mr. Bournemouth," answered Hern, "who have specialised in the robbery of private collections such as yours. And, when I say that they have specialised, I mean that they really are specialists. The elder, Bob Sadgrove, is a connoisseur in objects of *vertu*. He is really an expert: as expert as your secretary, Mr. Goodenough.

"Bill Sadgrove, the younger, was once an actor and is still a highly accomplished female-impersonator; so that he can, when it suits him, appear to be a very charming old lady: as charming as your housekeeper, Mrs. Merridew."

"But, good gracious!" exclaimed the inspector, "the Sadgroves vanished nearly ten years ago and have never been heard of since. I would give a year's pay to have those two under lock and key."

"Yes," said Hern, "they disappeared at the same time that Mr. Bournemouth engaged his secretary and his housekeeper. But they have not been idle in the last nine years. They have been helping Mr. Bournemouth to get together a collection really well worth robbing: so well worth robbing that, when they had pocketed the proceeds, they could have afforded to vanish forever. But there will be no proceeds to pocket; and there will be no need for you to sacrifice even a day's pay, Inspector; for they are already under lock and key. I brought them here in their own van."

The famous exponent of "the little grey cells," M. Hercule Poirot, in his first appearance in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." This is a story which has never appeared between the covers of any of Agatha Christie's own books published in America.

THE THIRD FLOOR FLAT

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"BOTHER!" said Pat.

With a deepening frown she rummaged wildly in the silken trifle she called an evening bag. Two young men and another girl watched her anxiously. They were all standing outside the closed door of Patricia Garnett's flat.

"It's no good," said Pat. "It's not there. And now what shall we do?"

"What is life without a latchkey?" murmured Jimmy Faulkener.

He was a short, broad-shouldered young man, with good-tempered blue eyes.

Pat turned on him angrily.

"Don't make jokes, Jimmy. This is serious."

"Look again, Pat," said Donovan Bailey. "It must be there somewhere."

He had a lazy, pleasant voice that matched his lean, dark figure.

"If you ever brought it out," said the other girl, Mildred Hope.

"Of course I brought it out," said Pat. "I believe I gave it to one of you two." She turned on the men accusingly. "I told Donovan to take it for me."

But she was not to find a scapegoat so easily. Donovan put in a firm disclaimer, and Jimmy backed him up.

"I saw you put it in your bag, myself,"said Jimmy.

"Well, then, one of you dropped it out when you picked up my bag. I've dropped it once or twice."

"Once or twice!" said Donovan. "You've dropped it a dozen times at least, besides leaving it behind on every possible occasion."

"I can't see why everything on earth doesn't drop out of it the whole time," said Jimmy.

"The point is — how are we going to get in?" said Mildred.

She was a sensible girl, who kept to the point, but she was not nearly so

attractive as the impulsive and troublesome Pat.

All four of them regarded the closed door blankly.

"Couldn't the porter help?" suggested Jimmy. "Hasn't he got a master key or something of that kind?"

Pat shook her head. There were only two keys. One was inside the flat hung up in the kitchen and the other was — or should be — in the maligned bag.

"If only the flat were on the ground floor," wailed Pat. "We could have broken open a window or something. Donovan, you wouldn't like to be a cat burglar, would you?"

Donovan declined firmly but politely to be a cat burglar.

"A flat on the fourth floor is a bit of an undertaking," said Jimmy.

"How about a fire escape?" suggested Donovan.

"There isn't one."

"There should be," said Jimmy. "A building five storeys high ought to have a fire escape."

"I daresay," said Pat. "But what should be doesn't help us. How am I ever to get into my flat?"

"Isn't there a sort of thingummybob?" said Donovan. "A thing the tradesmen send up chops and Brussels sprouts in?"

"The service lift," said Pat. "Oh, yes, but it's only a sort of wire-basket thing. Oh! wait — I know. What about the coal lift?"

"Now that," said Donovan, "is an idea."

Mildred made a discouraging suggestion.

"It'll be bolted," she said. "In Pat's kitchen, I mean, on the inside."

But the idea was instantly negatived.

"Don't you believe it," said Donovan.

"Not in *Pat's* kitchen," said Jimmy. "Pat never locks and bolts things."

"I don't think it's bolted," said Pat. "I took the dust-bin off this morning, and I'm sure I never bolted it afterwards, and I don't think I've been near it since."

"Well," said Donovan, "that fact's going to be very useful to us to-night, but, all the same, young Pat, let me point out to you that these slack habits are leaving you at the mercy of burglars (non-feline) every night."

Pat disregarded these admonitions.

"Come on," she cried, and began racing down the four flights of stairs. The others followed her. Pat led them through a dark recess, apparently

full to overflowing of perambulators, and through another door into the well of the flats, and guided them to the right lift. There was, at the moment, a dust-bin on it. Donovan lifted it off and stepped gingerly onto the platform in its place. He wrinkled up his nose.

"A little noisome," he remarked. "But what of that? Do I go alone on this venture or is anyone coming with me?"

"I'll come, too," said Jimmy.

He stepped on by Donovan's side.

"I suppose the lift will bear me," he added, doubtfully.

"You can't weigh much more than a ton of coal," said Pat, who had never been particularly strong on her weights-and-measures table.

"And anyway, we shall soon find out," said Donovan cheerfully, as he hauled on the rope.

With a grinding noise they disappeared from sight.

"This thing makes an awful noise," remarked Jimmy, as they passed up through blackness. "What will the people in the other flats think?"

"Ghosts or burglars, I expect," said Donovan. "Hauling this rope is quite heavy work. The porter of Friars Mansions does more work than I ever suspected. I say, Jimmy, old son, are you counting the floors?"

"Oh, Lord! no. I forgot about it."

"Well, I have, which is just as well. That's the third we're passing now. The next is ours."

"And now, I suppose," grumbled Jimmy, "we shall find that Pat did bolt the door after all."

But these fears were unfounded. The wooden door swung back at a touch and Donovan and Jimmy stepped out into the inky blackness of Pat's kitchen.

"We ought to have a torch for this wild night work," explained Donovan. "If I know Pat, everything's on the floor, and we shall smash endless crockery before I can get to the light switch. Don't move about, Jimmy, till I get the light on."

He felt his way cautiously over the floor, uttering one fervent "Damn!" as a corner of the kitchen table took him unawares in the ribs. He reached the switch, and in another moment another "Damn!" floated out of the darkness.

"What's the matter?" asked Jimmy.

"Light won't come on. Dud bulb, I suppose. Wait a minute. I'll turn the

sitting-room light on."

The sitting-room was the door immediately across the passage. Jimmy heard Donovan go out of the door, and presently fresh muffled curses reached him. He himself edged his way cautiously across the kitchen.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. Rooms get bewitched at night, I believe. Everything seems to be in a different place. Chairs and tables where you least expected it. Oh, hell! here's another!"

But at this moment Jimmy fortunately connected with the electric-light switch and pressed it down. In another minute two young men were looking at each other in silent horror.

This room was not Pat's sitting-room. *They were in the wrong flat.*

To begin with, the room was about ten times more crowded than Pat's which explained Donovan's pathetic bewilderment at repeatedly cannoning into chairs and tables. There was a large round table in the centre of the room covered with a baize cloth, and there was an aspidistra in the window. It was, in fact, the kind of room whose owner, the young men felt sure, would be difficult to explain to. With silent horror they gazed down at the table, on which lay a little pile of letters.

"Mrs. Ernestine Grant," breathed Donovan, picking them up and reading the name. "Oh! help. Do you think she's heard us?"

"It's a miracle she hasn't heard *you*," said Jimmy. "What with your language and the way you've been crashing into the furniture. Come on, for the Lord's sake, let's get out of here quickly."

They hastily switched off the light and retraced their steps on tip-toe to the lift. Jimmy breathed a sigh of relief as they regained the fastness of its depths without further incident.

"I do like a woman to be a good, sound sleeper," he said approvingly. "Mrs. Ernestine Grant has her points."

"I see it now," said Donovan; "why we made the mistake in the floor, I mean. Out in that well we started up from the basement." He heaved on the rope, and the lift shot up. "We're right this time."

"I devoutly trust we are," said Jimmy, as he stepped out into another inky void. "My nerves won't stand many more shocks of this kind."

But no further nerve strain was imposed. The first click of the light showed them Pat's kitchen, and in another minute they were opening the front door and admitting the two girls who were waiting outside.

"You have been a long time," grumbled Pat. "Mildred and I have been waiting here ages."

"We've had an adventure," said Donovan. "We might have been hauled off to the police station as dangerous malefactors."

Pat had passed on into the sitting-room, where she switched on the light and dropped her wrap on the sofa. She listened with lively interest to Donovan's account of his adventures.

"I'm glad she didn't catch you," she commented. "I'm sure she's an old curmudgeon. I got a note from her this morning — wanted to see me sometime — something she had to complain about — my piano, I suppose. People who don't like pianos over their heads shouldn't come and live in flats. I say, Donovan, you've hurt your hand. It's all over blood. Go and wash it under the tap."

Donovan looked down at his hand in surprise. He went out of the room obediently and presently his voice called to Jimmy.

"Hullo," said the other, "what's up? You haven't hurt yourself badly, have you?"

"I haven't hurt myself at all."

There was something so queer in Donovan's voice that Jimmy stared at him in surprise. Donovan held out his washed hand and Jimmy saw that there was no mark or cut of any kind on it.

"That's odd," he said, frowning. "There was quite a lot of blood. Where did it come from?"

And then, suddenly, he realised what his quicker-witted friend had already seen.

"By Jove," he said. "*It must have come from that flat.*"

He stopped, thinking over the possibilities his words implied.

"You're sure it was — er — blood?" he said. "Not paint?"

Donovan shook his head.

"It was blood, all right," he said, and shivered.

They looked at each other. The same thought was clearly in each of their minds. It was Jimmy who voiced it first.

"I say," he said awkwardly. "Do you think we ought to — well — go down again — and have — a — a look around? See it's all right, you know?"

"What about the girls?"

"We won't say anything to them. Pat's going to put on an apron and make us an omelet. We'll be back by the time they wonder where we are."

"Oh, well, come on," said Donovan. "I suppose we've got to go through with it. I daresay there isn't anything really wrong."

But his tone lacked conviction. They got into the lift and descended to the floor below. They found their way across the kitchen without much difficulty and once more switched on the sitting-room light.

"It must have been in here," said Donovan, "that — that I got the stuff on me. I never touched anything in the kitchen."

He looked round him. Jimmy did the same, and they both frowned. Everything looked neat and commonplace and miles removed from any suggestion of violence or gore.

Suddenly Jimmy started violently and caught his companion's arm.

"Look!"

Donovan followed the pointing finger, and in his turn uttered an exclamation. From beneath the heavy rep curtains there protruded a foot — a woman's foot in a gaping patent-leather shoe.

Jimmy went to the curtains and drew them sharply apart. In the recess of the window a woman's huddled body lay on the floor, a sticky dark pool beside it. She was dead, there was no doubt of that. Jimmy was attempting to raise her up when Donovan stopped him.

"You'd better not do that. She oughtn't to be touched till the police come."

"The police. Oh! of course. I say, Donovan, what a ghastly business. Who do you think she is? Mrs. Ernestine Grant?"

"Looks like it. At any rate, if there's anyone else in the flat they're keeping jolly quiet."

"What do we do next?" asked Jimmy. "Run out and get a policeman or ring up from Pat's flat?"

"I should think ringing up would be best. Come on, we might as well go out the front door. We can't spend the whole night going up and down in that evil-smelling lift."

Jimmy agreed. Just as they were passing through the door he hesitated.

"Look here; do you think one of us ought to stay — just to keep an eye on things — till the police come?"

"Yes, I think you're right. If you'll stay I'll run up and telephone."

He ran quickly up the stairs and rang the bell of the flat above. Pat came to open it, a very pretty Pat with a flushed face and a cooking apron on. Her eyes widened in surprise.

"You? But how — Donovan, what is it? Is anything the matter?"

He took both her hands in his.

"It's all right, Pat — only we've made rather an unpleasant discovery in the flat below. A woman — dead."

"Oh!" She gave a little gasp. "How horrible. Has she had a fit or something?"

"No. It looks — well — it looks rather as though she had been murdered."

"Oh! Donovan."

"I know. It's pretty beastly."

Her hands were still in his. She had left them there — was even clinging to him. Darling Pat — how he loved her. Did she care at all for him! Sometimes he thought she did. Sometimes he was afraid that Jimmy Faulkener — remembrances of Jimmy waiting patiently below made him start guiltily.

"Pat, dear, we must telephone to the police."

"Monsieur is right," said a voice behind him. "And in the meantime, while we are waiting their arrival, perhaps I can be of some slight assistance."

They had been standing in the doorway of the flat, and now they peered out on to the landing. A figure was standing on the stairs a little way above them. It moved down and into their range of vision.

They stood staring at a little man with very fierce moustaches and an egg-shaped head. He wore a resplendent dressing-gown and embroidered slippers. He bowed gallantly to Patricia.

"Mademoiselle!" he said. "I am, as perhaps you know, the tenant of the flat above. I like to be up high — the air — the view over London. I take the flat in the name of Mr. O'Connor. But I am not an Irishman. I have another name. That is why I venture to put myself at your service. Permit me."

With a flourish he pulled out a card and handed it to Pat. She read it.

"M. Hercule Poirot. Oh!" She caught her breath. "*The* M. Poirot? The great detective? And you will really help?"

"That is my intention, Mademoiselle. I nearly offered my help earlier in the evening."

Pat looked puzzled.

"I heard you discussing how to gain admission to your flat. Me, I am very clever at picking locks. I could without doubt have opened your door for you, but I hesitated to suggest it. You would have had the grave suspicions of me."

Pat laughed.

"Now, Monsieur," said Poirot to Donovan. "Go in, I pray of you, and telephone to the police. I will descend to the flat below."

Pat came down the stairs with him. They found Jimmy on guard and Pat explained Poirot's presence. Jimmy, in his turn, explained to Poirot his and Donovan's adventures. The detective listened attentively.

"The lift door was unbolted, you say? You emerged into the kitchen, but the light it would not turn on."

He directed his footsteps to the kitchen as he spoke. His fingers pressed the switch.

"*Tiens! Voilà ce qui est curieux!*" he said as the light flashed on. "It functions perfectly now. I wonder —"

He held up a finger to ensure silence and listened. A faint sound broke the stillness — the sound of an unmistakable snore.

"Ah!" said Poirot. "*La chambre de domestique.*"

He tiptoed across the kitchen into a little pantry, out of which led a door. He opened the door and switched on the light. The room was the kind of dog-kennel designed by the builders of flats to accommodate a human being. The floor space was almost entirely occupied by the bed. In the bed was a rosy-cheeked girl lying on her back with her mouth wide open snoring placidly.

Poirot switched off the light and beat a retreat.

"She will not wake," he said. "We will let her sleep till the police come."

He went back to the sitting-room. Donovan had joined them.

"The police will be here almost immediately, they say," he said breathlessly. "We are to touch nothing."

Poirot nodded.

"We will not touch," he said. "We will look, that is all."

He moved into the room. Mildred had come down with Donovan, and all four young people stood in the doorway and watched him with breathless interest.

"What I can't understand, sir, is this," said Donovan. "I never went near the window — how did the blood come on my hand?"

"My young friend, the answer to that stares you in the face. Of what colour is the tablecloth? Red, is it not? and doubtless you did put your hand on the table."

"Yes, I did. Is that —" He stopped.

Poirot nodded. He was bending over the table. He indicated with his hand a dark patch on the red.

"It was here that the crime was committed," he said solemnly. "The body was moved afterwards."

Then he stood upright and looked slowly round the room. He did not move, he handled nothing, but nevertheless the four watching felt as though every object in that rather frowsty place gave up its secret to his observant eye.

Hercule Poirot nodded his head as though satisfied. A little sigh escaped him.

"I see," he said.

"You see what?" asked Donovan curiously.

"I see," said Poirot, "what you doubtless *felt* — that the room is overfull of furniture."

Donovan smiled ruefully.

"I did go barging about a bit," he confessed. "Of course, everything was in a different place to Pat's room, and I couldn't make it out."

"Not everything," said Poirot.

Donovan looked at him inquiringly.

"I mean," said Poirot apologetically, "that certain things are always fixed. In a block of flats the door, the window, the fireplace — they are in the same place in the rooms which are below each other."

"Isn't that rather splitting hairs?" asked Mildred. She was looking at Poirot with faint disapproval.

"One should always speak with absolute accuracy. That is a little — how do you say? — fad of mine."

There was the noise of footsteps on the stairs, and three men came in. They were a police inspector, a constable, and the divisional surgeon. The Inspector recognised Poirot and greeted him in an almost reverential manner. Then he turned to the others.

"I shall want statements from everyone," he began, "but in the first place —"

Poirot interrupted.

"A little suggestion. We will go back to the flat upstairs and Mademoiselle here shall do what she was planning to do — make us an omelet. Me, I have a passion for the omelets. Then, M. l'Inspecteur, when you have finished here, you will mount to us and ask questions at your leisure."

It was arranged accordingly, and Poirot went up with them.

"M. Poirot," said Pat, "I think you're a perfect dear. And you shall have a lovely omelet. I really make omelets frightfully well."

"That is good. Once, Mademoiselle, I loved a beautiful young English girl, who resembled you greatly — but alas! she could not cook. So perhaps everything was for the best."

There was a faint sadness in his voice, and Jimmy Faulkener looked at him curiously.

Once in the flat, however, he exerted himself to please and amuse. The grim tragedy below was almost forgotten.

The omelet had been consumed and duly praised by the time that Inspector Rice's footsteps were heard. He came in accompanied by the doctor, having left the constable below.

"Well, Monsieur Poirot," he said. "It all seems clear and above-board — not much in your line, though we may find it hard to catch the man. I'd just like to hear how the discovery came to be made."

Donovan and Jimmy between them recounted the happenings of the evening. The inspector turned reproachfully to Pat.

"You shouldn't leave your lift door unbolted, Miss. You really shouldn't."

"I shan't again," said Pat, with a shiver. "Somebody might come in and murder me like that poor woman below."

"Ah! but they didn't come in that way, though," said the Inspector.

"You will recount to us what you have discovered, yes?" said Poirot.

"I don't know as I ought to — but seeing it's you, M. Poirot. . . ."

"*Précisément*," said Poirot. "And these young people — they will be discreet."

"The newspapers will get hold of it, anyway, soon enough," said the Inspector. "There's no real secret about the matter. Well, the dead woman's Mrs. Grant, all right. I had the porter up to identify her. Woman of about thirty-five. She was sitting at the table, and she was shot with an automatic pistol of small calibre, probably by someone sitting opposite her at table. She fell forward, and that's how the bloodstain came on the table."

"But wouldn't someone have heard the shot?" asked Mildred.

"The pistol was fitted with a silencer. No, you wouldn't hear anything. By the way, did you hear the screech the maid let out when we told her her mistress was dead? No. Well, that just shows how unlikely it was that anyone would hear the other."

"Has the maid no story to tell?" asked Poirot.

"It was her evening out. She's got her own key. She came in about ten o'clock. Everything was quiet. She thought her mistress had gone to bed."

"She did not look in the sitting-room, then?"

"Yes, she took the letters in there which had come by the evening post, but she saw nothing unusual — any more than Mr. Faulkener and Mr. Bailey did. You see, the murderer had concealed the body rather neatly behind the curtains."

"But it was a curious thing to do, don't you think?"

Poirot's voice was very gentle, yet it held something that made the Inspector look up quickly.

"Didn't want the crime discovered till he'd had time to make his getaway."

"Perhaps — perhaps — but continue with what you were saying."

"The maid went out at five o'clock. The doctor here puts the time of death as — roughly — about four to five hours ago. That's right, isn't it?"

The doctor, who was a man of few words, contented himself with jerking his head affirmatively.

"It's a quarter to twelve now. The actual time can, I think, be narrowed down to a fairly definite hour."

He took out a crumpled sheet of paper.

"We found this in the pocket of the dead woman's dress. You needn't be afraid of handling it. There are no fingerprints on it."

Poirot smoothed out the sheet. Across it some words were printed in small prim capitals.

"I will come to see you this evening at half-past seven. — J. F."

"A compromising document to leave behind," commented Poirot, as he handed it back.

"Well, he didn't know she'd got it in her pocket," said the Inspector. "He probably thought she'd destroyed it. We've evidence that he *was* a careful man, though. The pistol she was shot with we found under the body — and there again no finger-prints. They'd been wiped off very carefully with a silk handkerchief."

"How do you know," said Poirot, "that it was a *silk* handkerchief?"

"Because we found it," said the Inspector triumphantly. "At the last, as he was drawing the curtains, he must have let it fall unnoticed."

He handed across a big white silk handkerchief — a good-quality handker-

chief. It did not need the Inspector's finger to draw Poirot's attention to the mark on it in the centre. It was neatly marked and quite legible. Poirot read the name out.

"John Fraser."

"That's it," said the Inspector. "John Fraser — J. F. in the note. We know the name of the man we have to look for, and I daresay when we find out a little about the dead woman, and her relations come forward, we shall soon get a line on him."

"I wonder," said Poirot. "No, *mon cher*, somehow I do not think he will be easy to find, your John Fraser. He is a strange man — careful, since he marks his handkerchiefs and wipes the pistol with which he has committed the crime — yet careless since he loses his handkerchief and does not search for a letter that might incriminate him."

"Flurried, that's what he was," said the Inspector.

"It is possible," said Poirot. "Yes, it is possible. And he was not seen entering the building?"

"There are all sorts of people going in and out at that time. These are big blocks. I suppose none of you" — he addressed the four collectively — "saw anyone coming out of the flat?"

Pat shook her head.

"We went out earlier — about seven o'clock."

"I see." The Inspector rose. Poirot accompanied him to the door.

"As a little favour, may I examine the flat below?"

"Why, certainly, M. Poirot. I know what they think of you at headquarters. I'll leave you a key. I've got two. It will be empty. The maid cleared out to some relatives, too scared to stay there alone."

"I thank you," said M. Poirot. He went back into the flat thoughtful.

"You're not satisfied, M. Poirot?" said Jimmy.

"No," said Poirot. "I am not satisfied."

Donovan looked at him curiously. "What is it that — well, worries you?"

Poirot did not answer. He remained silent for a minute or two, frowning, as though in thought, then he made a sudden impatient movement of shoulders.

"I will say good-night to you, Mademoiselle. You must be tired. You have had much cooking to do — eh?"

Pat laughed.

"Only the omelet. I didn't do dinner. Donovan and Jimmy came and

called for us, and we went out to a little place in Soho."

"And then without doubt, you went to a theatre?"

"Yes. 'The Brown Eyes of Caroline.' "

"Ah!" said Poirot. "It should have been blue eyes — the blue eyes of Mademoiselle."

He made a sentimental gesture, and then once more wished Pat good-night, also Mildred, who was staying the night by special request, as Pat admitted frankly that she would get the horrors if left alone on this particular night.

The two young men accompanied Poirot. When the door was shut, and they were preparing to say good-bye to him on the landing, Poirot forestalled them.

"My young friends, you heard me say that I was not satisfied? *Eh bien*, it is true — I am not. I go now to make some little investigations of my own. You would like to accompany me — yes?"

An eager assent greeted this proposal. Poirot led the way to the flat below and inserted the key the Inspector had given him in the lock. On entering, he did not, as the others had expected, enter the sitting-room. Instead he went straight to the kitchen. In a little recess which served as a scullery a big iron bin was standing. Poirot uncovered this, and doubling himself up, began to rootle in it with the energy of a ferocious terrier.

Both Jimmy and Donovan stared at him in amazement.

Suddenly with a cry of triumph he emerged. In his hand he held aloft a small stoppered bottle.

"*Voilà!*" he said. "I find what I seek."

He sniffed at it delicately.

"Alas! I am *enrhumé* — I have the cold in the head."

Donovan took the bottle from him and sniffed in his turn, but could smell nothing. He took out the stopper and held the bottle to his nose before Poirot's warning cry could stop him.

Immediately he fell like a log. Poirot, by springing forward, partly broke his fall.

"Imbecile!" he cried. "The idea. To remove the stopper in that foolhardy manner! Did he not observe how delicately I handled it? Monsieur — Faulkener — is it not? Will you be so good as to get me a little brandy? I observed a decanter in the sitting-room."

Jimmy hurried off, but by the time he returned, Donovan was sitting up

and declaring himself quite all right again. He had to listen to a short lecture from Poirot on the necessity of caution in sniffing at possibly poisonous substances.

"I think I'll be off home," said Donovan, rising shakily to his feet. "That is, if I can't be any more use here. I feel a bit wonky still."

"Assuredly," said Poirot. "That is the best thing you can do. M. Faulkener, attend me here a little minute. I will return on the instant."

He accompanied Donovan to the door and beyond. They remained outside on the landing talking for some minutes. When Poirot at last re-entered the flat he found Jimmy standing in the sitting-room gazing round him with puzzled eyes.

"Well, M. Poirot," he said, "what next?"

"There is nothing next. The case is finished."

"What?"

"I know everything — now."

Jimmy stared at him.

"That little bottle you found?"

"Exactly. That little bottle."

Jimmy shook his head.

"I can't make head or tail of it. For some reason or other I can see you are dissatisfied with the evidence against this John Fraser, whoever he may be."

"*Whoever he may be*," repeated Poirot softly. "If he is anyone at all — well, I shall be surprised."

"I don't understand."

"He is a name — that is all — a name carefully marked on a handkerchief!"

"And the letter?"

"Did you notice that it was printed? Now why? I will tell you. Handwriting might be recognised, and a typewritten letter is more easily traced than you would imagine — but if a *real* John Fraser wrote that letter those two points would not have appealed to him! No, it was written on purpose, and put in the dead woman's pocket for us to find. There is no such person as John Fraser."

Jimmy looked at him inquiringly.

"And so," went on Poirot, "I went back to the point that first struck me. You heard me say that certain things in a room were always in the same place under given circumstances. I gave three instances. I might have men-

tioned a fourth — *the electric-light switch, my friend.*"

Jimmy still stared uncomprehendingly. Poirot went on.

"Your friend Donovan did not go near the window — it was by resting his hand on this table that he got it covered in blood! But I asked myself at once — *why did he rest it there?* What was he doing groping about this room in darkness? For remember, my friend, *the electric-light switch is always in the same place — by the door.* Why, when he came to this room, did he not at once feel for the light and turn it on? That was the natural, the normal thing to do. According to him, he tried to turn on the light in the kitchen, but failed. Yet when I tried the switch it was in perfect working order. Did he, then, not wish the light to go on just then? If it had gone on you would both have seen at once that you were in the wrong flat. There would have been no reason to come into this room."

"What are you driving at, M. Poirot? I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"I mean — this."

Poirot held up a Yale door-key.

"The key of this flat?"

"No, *mon ami,* the key of the flat above. Mademoiselle Patricia's key, which M. Donovan Bailey abstracted from her bag some time during the evening."

"But why — why?"

"*Parbleu!* so that he could do what he wanted to do — gain admission to this flat in a perfectly unsuspicious manner. He made sure that the lift door was unbolted earlier in the evening."

"Where did you get the key?"

Poirot's smile broadened.

"I found it just now — where I looked for it — in M. Donovan's pocket. See you, that little bottle I pretended to find was a ruse. M. Donovan is taken in. He does what I knew he would do — unstoppers it and sniffs. And in that little bottle is Ethyl Chloride, a very powerful instant anæsthetic. It gives me just the moment or two of unconsciousness I need. I take from his pocket the two things that I knew would be there. This key was one of them — the other —"

He stopped and then went on:

"I questioned at the time the reason the Inspector gave for the body being concealed behind the curtain. To gain time? No, there was more than that.

And so I thought of just one thing — *the post*, my friend. The evening post that comes at half-past nine or thereabouts. Say the murderer does not find something he expects to find, but that something may be delivered by post later. Clearly, then, he must come back. But the crime must not be discovered by the maid when she comes in, or the police would take possession of the flat, so he hides the body behind the curtain. And the maid suspects nothing and lays the letters on the table as usual."

"The letters?"

"Yes, the letters." Poirot drew something from his pocket.

"This is the second article I took from M. Donovan when he was unconscious." He showed the superscription — a typewritten envelope addressed to Mrs. Ernestine Grant. "But I will ask you one thing first, M. Faulkener, before we look at the contents of this letter. Are you or are you not in love with Mademoiselle Patricia?"

"I care for Pat damnably — but I've never thought I had a chance."

"You thought that she cared for M. Donovan? It may be that she had begun to care for him — but it was only a beginning, my friend. It is for you to make her forget — to stand by her in her trouble."

"Trouble?" said Jimmy sharply.

"Yes, trouble. We will do all we can to keep her name out of it, but it will be impossible to do so entirely. She was, you see, the motive."

He ripped open the envelope that he held. An enclosure fell out. The covering letter was brief, and was from a firm of solicitors.

DEAR MADAM,

The document you enclose is quite in order, and the fact of the marriage having taken place in a foreign country does not invalidate it in any way.

Yours truly, etc.

Poirot spread out the enclosure. It was a certificate of marriage between Donovan Bailey and Ernestine Grant, dated eight years ago.

"Oh, my God!" said Jimmy. "Pat said she'd had a letter from the woman asking to see her, but she never dreamed it was anything important."

Poirot nodded.

"M. Donovan knew — he went to see his wife this evening before going to the flat above (a strange irony, by the way, that led the unfortunate woman to come to this building where her rival lived) — he murdered her in cold blood — and then went on to his evening's amusement. His wife must

have told him that she had sent the marriage certificate to her solicitors, and was expecting to hear from them. Doubtless he himself had tried to make her believe that there was a flaw in the marriage."

"He seemed in quite good spirits, too, all the evening. M. Poirot, you haven't let him escape?" Jimmy shuddered.

"There is no escape for him," said Poirot gravely. "You need not fear."

"It's Pat I'm thinking about mostly," said Jimmy. "You don't think — she really cared."

"*Mon ami*, that is your part," said Poirot gently. "To make her turn to you and forget. I do not think you will find it very difficult!"

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Murdered Writer *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"So," handsome radio star Dunstan Montrose sneered, "you *demand* five times as much as I'm paying you for that tripe you write and you *demand* that you be credited with authorship on the air! Listen, Danver, — two years ago when you were broke you signed a ten-year contract with me. You don't get another dime!"

"But it isn't right," Lyle Danver pleaded. "Everyone knows that more than half of your success is *my* material that you claim *you* write! I'll do something desperate." The writer broke off as radio actress Thyra Freeman called, "Hello," from the doorway. . . .

Professor Fordney crouched beside the pajama-clad body of Lyle Danver. His throat was cut almost from ear to ear — a ghastly wound. Danver's torso and hands were blood-stained. Blood was almost everywhere about the tile bath. The criminologist looked about, then opened the spotless medicine cabinet door above the blood-stained wash basin. In it he found a closed, blood-stained, straight razor. Yes, Danver *could* have cut his throat, closed the razor and put it in the chest. There were authenticated records proving such a possibility. But . . . He noted that the tub and shower curtains were damp. Danver hadn't bathed before his death. H'mmmm. . . .

"I found him an hour ago when I came in, Professor," Montrose explained. "Miss Freeman overheard him earlier this evening say he intended doing something desperate, but we hadn't thought of suicide."

"That's enough!" snapped Fordney. "You're a liar and a murderer! Take him away, Sergeant!"

What single clue told Fordney Danver was not a suicide but had been murdered?

Solution

While Danver could have cut his throat then put the razor in the medicine chest, the criminologist knew that he had *not* done so and that, therefore, he had been murdered. Both of Danver's hands were bloody, as was the razor, yet the *closed* door of the medicine cabinet was spotless. This is the clue that proved Danver did not put the razor in the cabinet, but that his murderer had. Montrose confessed that he had killed Danver in fear that he would blab about the truth of their relations. He knocked Danver unconscious, then stripped to avoid getting blood on his clothes. He cut Danver's throat, arranged the body — then bathed. In his excitement and panic, he put the bloody razor, holding it in a towel, in the cabinet and closed the door.

In response to our appeal for writers to submit superior original manuscripts, Mr. Smith came through valiantly with "Seesaw" — a short story of constant surprises, cleverly conceived, and with a hold-on-to-your-hats ending.

SEESAW

by LAURENCE DWIGHT SMITH

WHEN I escorted Jeff Saunders into the lounge of the Idlers' Club after luncheon, the lotus-eaters around the fireplace were titillated. None of them had met him, except vicariously, through his courtroom exploits. And here he was, in the rather gaunt flesh, folding himself into the armchair nearest the fire. I needed no fire, being sufficiently warmed by reflected glory.

A well-publicized murder trial had been the subject on the mat, and naturally everyone wanted to get the great legal tongue wagging on it. It was one of those open-and-shut affairs, a water-tight case; but the accused was prominent socially, and there were certain sensational details that begged to be pawed over. But Jeff Saunders had nothing to say. He sat taking in the group with the look in his flinty gray-blue eyes of an archeologist examining fossils.

Finally Sid Northwright, who has less respect than most for the privacy of a man's thoughts, turned to Jeff and addressed him point-blank: "Look here, Mr. Saunders, can you as a lawyer explain how a man of his breeding and position could bring himself to commit such a disgusting crime?"

Jeff sank lower into the chair.

"How do you know he did?" he asked solemnly.

Northwright gaped. No one doubted the murderer's guilt.

"Why," blustered Northwright, "there's no question of it, Mr. Saunders! Haven't you read the evidence? No sane jury can come to any other conclusion."

"The human mind abhors cerebration," Saunders yawned. "It follows the path of least resistance. It is important for it to reach a conclusion, any conclusion, so that it can rest — that is, cease struggling. The average intelligence is a trickle of rainwater following the path of least resistance down a window-pane, its destination the putty of stagnation."

Sid was not a man to be awed by reputations.

"But the evidence," he retorted sharply. "Surely in this case you can't consider such a conclusion as having been arrived at through the path of least resistance. On the contrary, Saunders, it's the path of *greatest* resistance. The mind of any decent man is revolted at having to accept such a conclusion about one of his own kind."

"Evidence!" Saunders smiled at Sid Northwright. He had measured the man. "What do we know about evidence, Mr. Northwright? Presumptive, circumstantial, *prima facie* — piffle. Presumption is mere inference. The word is accurate in its original sense of arrogance. Circumstantial by definition is the establishing of doubtful facts. Meaning casual, it, too, is well chosen. *Prima facie*, indeed, not *ultima*. There is no evidence so misleading as what is called 'conclusive.' Only the prisoner knows whether he is guilty or not. The one thing you can be sure of is that they will electrocute him. When that is done you will accept his execution, illogically enough, as the final proof of his guilt."

Sid squirmed with exasperation. In fact, they were all slightly ruffled that anyone should challenge them on the score of open-mindedness.

"I take it that you are familiar with the details of the case?" Sid asked ironically.

"Oh no," drawled Saunders. "As a matter of fact, I haven't read a word about it."

With a grunt that left no doubt of his opinion, Sid got up and stood with his back to the fireplace, glaring down at Saunders.

"I've scrupulously avoided reading any testimony or evidence in criminal trials — except of course when I'm obliged to, professionally — since the Lewis Cole affair," Saunders continued, putting his feet on the chair Sid had vacated. "For that kind of cerebral exercise I confine myself to detective novels. It's the only place in which evidence has significance."

"The Lewis Cole affair?" Sid scowled. "Never heard of it."

The others looked equally bellicose.

"What was it, Jeff?" I asked hastily.

"You're really interested?" Jeff looked around at the circle of faces with an expression of pleasure.

I smiled as they all settled back.

For sometime after I graduated from law school (Saunders began), my

hobby — if you could call it that — actually was the study of the value of evidence. I was lucky in having as a cousin Conrad Phelps, who was a police captain. I used to spend a lot of time at his precinct station, and occasionally he took me out on cases.

One February evening — it must have been back in 1921 — we were chatting in his office when the telephone rang. He was grinning at something I had said when he put the receiver to his ear, but his face became serious very quickly.

When he hung up he turned to me and said, "That was my young friend, Dennis Cole. His uncle is in his apartment, dead. Dennis sounded pretty scared. Wants me to come over at once."

Conrad smiled.

"You can come along if you want to, Jeff."

I wanted to.

On our way out he called to Sergeant Clerkin, a large, red-faced plain-clothesman.

"Come along, Clerkin."

I glanced at the clock above the desk. It was exactly ten-four.

A Negro elevator boy took us up to Dennis Cole's second-floor apartment on East Sixtieth Street. Conrad rang the bell and the door was immediately opened by Cole, a yellow-headed young fellow of about thirty. When he saw three of us his face went so white that his freckles seemed to stand out from his skin.

"Come in!" We stepped into a room that was rank with the smell of whiskey and cigar smoke. He closed the door after us, and said calmly, "Captain Phelps, Uncle Lewis has been murdered."

"Murdered?" Conrad raised his brows. "You just said 'dead' on the phone."

"Well, it couldn't have been an accident," Cole explained in a steady voice. "There's the knife over there." He pointed to a small paring knife, about seven inches long, lying on the floor in a bloody pool. "It's fully twenty feet from Uncle Lewis' body. He's on the couch."

The couch, as we saw when we turned, was set in a recess in the wall, and so had not been immediately discernible when we entered the room. Furthermore, the light from the parchment-shaded lamp on the table did not fall directly upon it. What we saw was not a pleasant sight, I assure you.

After one glimpse I looked away and managed to control a violent impulse to be sick. Since the War I'd been unable to endure the sight of blood, and the stream of it that had trickled from the corner of the open mouth onto the man's white collar was not all that I saw in that brief second to horrify me. From then on I carefully avoided looking in the direction of the couch, but I can give with accuracy every detail of the position of the body, because I studied the police photographs of it later.

He was lying partially on his right side, facing the room. His head, however, was grotesquely turned towards the wall, and his left arm hung over the side of the couch. An ugly stain spread out in all directions from a slit in the left side of his coat where the paring knife had pierced it. The slit was directly over the heart. The expression on the face was that of a man who has suddenly relaxed after a struggle.

Conrad Phelps and the sergeant did not go over to the couch; they stood and looked. After a moment my cousin said grimly: "There doesn't seem to be any doubt as to the cause of death. Judging from the position of the wound, the knife probably pierced the left ventricle of the heart. However, we'll leave those details to the medical examiner. In the meantime nothing is to be touched." He turned from his survey of the figure on the couch. "Dennis," he asked, "where were you when this happened?"

"I drove out to Long Island in my car. When I got back I found him like that." Cole glanced towards the couch and his lips twitched.

"Who let him in?"

"I did. He came about eight o'clock. We talked awhile, and then I went out to my office in Flushing. I got back just after ten and called you immediately."

"At what time did you start for Flushing?"

Cole thought for a moment.

"It was exactly eight twenty-seven when I left here."

"How can you be so sure of the time?"

"Because I looked at my watch. You see, Uncle Lewis was to wait for me here. I estimated the time it would take me to drive out and back, and told him I could make it by ten. He said that would be all right. He had a poker game on at his club after ten, so he said he'd wait here as his club's just down at 57th Street."

"Let me see your watch, Dennis." Conrad compared it with his own and I noticed the two agreed to the minute. "All right, Dennis," he said, re-

turning Cole's watch. "Now give me the names of whoever can establish your alibi."

"That's the hell of it," Cole answered thickly. "I didn't speak to anyone, and I don't know that anybody saw me."

The captain wrinkled his forehead and turned to Sergeant Clerkin.

"Sergeant," he said, "I've known Mr. Cole for some years; he's a friend. Under the circumstances I want you to feel at liberty to ask any questions you care to. It will be best for all concerned," he added, speaking to Cole, "if Clerkin completely ignores the fact of our acquaintance."

"I understand," Dennis Cole nodded.

"Mr. Cole," said the sergeant, "if you were absolutely positive of the time you started out, why did you have to stop and think before answering the captain's question?"

"I didn't realize I had," Dennis answered, flushing. "If I did it's because I'm — well — bewildered." He sank onto a chair. "I know I'm in a pretty deep hole."

That he should be cautious in answering was natural enough; for, as he said, he was in a deep hole. I felt a sudden pity for him and a resentment at the sergeant's tone.

"What did you go to Flushing for?"

"To get an insurance policy."

"Are you your uncle's heir?"

"I believe so, but I don't know for sure. I'm next of kin, that's all I know. It wasn't his policy I went for, though. It was my own."

"Your own," Clerkin repeated. "Where is it? Let's see it."

"In the desk drawer over there." Cole went to a mahogany desk that stood between the two front windows and returned with a manila envelope.

"Why wasn't it in your pocket if it's what you went to Flushing for?"

"Because I put it in the drawer after I got back." Cole looked irritated rather than frightened. "Suppose you let me give you the facts my own way." He turned appealingly to Conrad Phelps.

"All right. Go ahead," my cousin muttered. "But first, Dennis, tell me this. You say you left at eight twenty-seven and returned a minute or two after ten. The elevator man can verify that, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not," Cole shrugged. "I always walk down. It's only one flight. Williams wasn't at the switchboard when I went out. I remember hearing the elevator running, so he must have been taking someone up. The car

was being used when I came in and I ran up the steps."

"Sergeant," Phelps turned quickly to Clerkin, "go downstairs and report to headquarters. I don't want this phone touched because of possible fingerprints. Tell them I want the doctor right away and to send a photographer along. Then get hold of the elevator boy, and find out if he was running the car at the times Mr. Cole mentioned. If possible see the passengers to check Williams's story."

When the sergeant had left Dennis Cole gave a detailed account of the evening. About seven o'clock, according to his story, he had located Lewis Cole by phone at Cole's club and said he must see his uncle on a matter of importance. He said his uncle sounded as if he had been drinking. Dennis was sure of it when Lewis Cole arrived later; Dennis intimated that "the old boy" was quite a "souse." Dennis asked him for a loan of two thousand dollars to cover a margin account. If the old boy didn't put that amount up in the morning Dennis's broker would sell him out. His uncle gave him a long lecture about playing the market, but agreed in the end to make the loan, providing Dennis gave him collateral. In telling his story Cole said, "Uncle Lewis told me that he wouldn't lend me any more money." And then under questioning he admitted that he was already in debt to his uncle for twelve thousand. For that there had been no collateral, not even a note. The policy he said he had gone to get in Flushing was a twenty-thousand-dollar life contract on which he had paid premiums for ten years, so that it had cash value.

According to Dennis's story, his uncle asked him for a drink after he had been there about fifteen minutes, and Dennis called his bootlegger (*these were the early days of Prohibition, interjected Saunders*) and had a pint of rye sent around. Dennis said the doctor had forbidden him to drink anything because of a bad heart; there were a few bottles of burgundy in the apartment, but no hard liquor. The rye was delivered almost at once, from the drug store across the street. Dennis drew the cork and put the pint on the table with a glass, some ice, and two bottles of soda, he said; then he had opened a box of cigars, as his uncle had none, and had hurried out to his car, which was parked before the building.

While Dennis was talking I let my eyes wander about the room. The corkscrew, still impaling the cork, was lying under the center table on which, to my surprise, I saw two glasses, not one. There was a little rye and soda at the bottom of each. I counted six cigar butts in the ash tray beside

the glasses, and I noticed that the same number of cigars was missing from the box.

When Cole had finished his story it was obvious that Conrad Phelps, too, had seen this. He sat in silence for several minutes, looking sharply at Dennis; then he said, "Your uncle — was he familiar with the lay-out of your apartment?"

"Oh, yes," Dennis answered quickly. "He was quite at home here."

Of course, I said to myself, his uncle could have got himself a clean glass, but that he could have smoked six large-sized cigars in an hour and a half — one every fifteen minutes — was incredible.

"You say that you got the ice before you left?" Conrad was still surveying the table darkly.

"Yes. From the refrigerator."

"Did you empty the tray?"

"Into that thermos jar." Dennis pointed to a green jug on the table.

Phelps opened it and peered in.

"Nine ice cubes left," he announced. "How many does the tray hold?"

"Twelve."

"How many trays are there?"

"Only one."

"Did you refill it?"

"Yes."

Phelps disappeared into the kitchen. When he returned a moment later he looked glum.

"Dennis," he said somberly, "you're only making matters worse by lying."

"But I'm not lying," Cole cried. "I've told the truth!"

"You are lying! You told me that over an hour and a half ago you dumped out the ice and refilled the tray. Yet the water in the tray is warm. It would be at least half congealed if you had done it at the time you claim."

Dennis was silent. He just held his head. Conrad Phelps paced the room until Sergeant Clerkin returned.

The sergeant's report completed the destruction of Cole's alibi.

Williams had run the elevator only three times after bringing up Lewis Cole: once when the liquor came; a second time a few minutes later to take a Miss Perkins up to her apartment on the fourth floor; and the last time when Miss Perkins went out at nine forty-five. At no other times had

Williams left the switchboard. If Cole had come in at ten o'clock Williams would have seen him. The Negro was positive about the exact hour because he had been listening to a small radio and had heard the station announcement when Miss Perkins went out.

Also, the sergeant had put his hand on the radiator of Cole's car. It was cold, Clerkin said. That, however, seemed not unreasonable to me, as it was a very cold night. But the patrolman on the beat recalled seeing the car, which he knew well and recognised by its torn canvas top, at nine forty-seven. At that time he had made his routine call to the station house. The box was at the corner not more than twenty feet from the car.

Well, gentlemen, much as he hated to do it, Conrad Phelps put Dennis Cole under formal arrest.

Sid Northwright looked speculatively at Saunders. "So what?" he asked, in his softest, most disagreeable, tone.

"I have laid the evidence before you as unbiasedly as possible," said Jeff Saunders, closing his remarkable eyes. "On the one hand, we have Cole's statement that he was out on Long Island until ten o'clock. On the other, we have the testimony of two impartial witnesses that make certain parts of his story impossible. Besides, there is convincing circumstantial evidence that someone very much at home had been in the room. Add to this the fact that only his and his uncle's fingerprints were on the knife — which was the case — and that Dennis was Lewis Cole's heir, and, furthermore, would be relieved of a twelve-thousand-dollar debt by his uncle's demise. If you were an impartial jury and had heard not my recital of evidence but the fiery oratory of a prosecuting attorney, what verdict would you gentlemen have reached by the processes of what Mr. Northwright calls the 'rational mind'?"

Saunders did not wait for an answer.

"Of course," he continued, "you will surmise that Dennis Cole was not guilty, knowing that otherwise the story would be without point. But while that may seem a reasonable deduction now, it could not have been made at the time. It was a fortuitous circumstance which gave the case its next twist and resulted in our placing an entirely different interpretation upon the evidence."

It was Sergeant Clerkin who first noticed the too-small amount of ashes

in the trays, and the fact that there were only three burnt matches (*Saunders went on*).

"You said that you opened the cigar box just before leaving," Conrad Phelps declared impatiently. "Have you emptied the trays since?"

"I haven't touched a thing since I came back," Cole answered wearily. "I've just been sitting here scared to death. Oh, yes, I opened the desk drawer and tossed in my insurance policy. When I opened the door I thought Uncle Lewis had gone. But I went into the bedroom to make sure he wasn't taking a nap. I left my hat and coat in there. When I came back in here I saw what had happened. Then I telephoned you."

"What did you open the cigar box with?" the sergeant asked.

Cole pointed towards the paring knife on the floor, but I refrained from looking.

"I got it from the kitchen. . . . Look here," he went on in a sudden surge of panic. "I know what you're thinking. The two glasses there, and all those cigar butts — it looks as though I'd been here all evening smoking and drinking with him. I can't give you any proof that I haven't. But I swear — I give you my word — it's not true!"

It was in hunting for the missing ashes that the sergeant made the next discovery. In the scrap-basket he found portions of six cigars that had been neatly cut off and hidden under the papers. Closer inspection revealed that the butts had scarcely been smoked at all.

The discovery seemed to revive Dennis's ebbing courage. His eyes glittered as he grabbed Phelps's elbow.

"Conrad," he cried, "can't an examination be made of the contents of my stomach? That will prove that I haven't had a drop to drink! Someone else put that glass on the table. *Someone must have come here after I left.*"

"Hold on, Dennis. That may not be necessary." Conrad was on his knees beside the table, his eyes within an inch or two of the tumblers. "Whoever used one of those glasses removed the prints," he announced, getting to his feet. "One shows finger and lip marks, and the other's as clean as a whistle."

A groan escaped from Cole's lips.

"Think carefully, Dennis," Phelps said gently, "how do you know what time it was when you got back? You said shortly after ten. Did you look at your watch when you came in?"

"No," Cole replied, after a moment's thought. "I looked at it when I hung up after telephoning you. It was ten-two then."

"And you called me immediately?"

"Yes. That is, I called your home. First I got a busy signal. So I waited a few minutes and called again. You see, I was hoping to get you at home. I wanted to get you unofficially, if possible."

"Did anyone answer the second time you called?"

"No. I held on for several minutes."

"Then what did you do?"

"I thought it was funny that I got the busy signal and then no answer. That made me think that perhaps I'd dialed the wrong number, so I looked it up in the book again, and made another try. But no one answered. Then I looked up the precinct number. The first time I called it was busy; the second time I got you."

It was four minutes after ten when Conrad and I had left the station house, I remembered. That checked with the time Cole said he got through to us. It occurred to me that seventeen minutes could easily have been consumed after Dennis parked the car. Three minutes to come upstairs, another three to put away the policy and go into the bedroom and take off his coat and return to find the body of his uncle — that would leave eleven minutes, if he had really entered the building at nine forty-five, when Williams was running the elevator. Eleven minutes might have been spent in telephoning and looking up numbers; which would bring Dennis's call to Phelps to ten-two. Check.

My speculations were interrupted by a low whistle from the sergeant, who was quietly continuing his inspection of the room. He had found on the floor a small moon-shaped piece of iron that proved to be a broken piece of window lock. The shade of the window with the broken lock was half-way up, although those of the others were drawn down to the sill — that is, those of the two windows facing Sixtieth Street. The west window before which the Sergeant was standing looked across the space some twenty feet wide between this building and an apartment house. Outside this window was one of those little ornamental balconies of iron grillework, about big enough to set half a dozen plants on. Ten feet below was the roof of a single-story building — an old mews, I believe. An agile person could leap from it and catch hold of the balcony. Furthermore there were marks that showed that the window had recently been jimmied from the outside, and one of Dennis Cole's pots of ivy was lying smashed on the roof directly beneath.

Then the sergeant did something I thought was pretty clever. You see, Clerkin had changed his interpretation of the evidence and was determined to prove his new theory. He turned to Cole and asked him if he had a thermometer. Cole, as mystified as I, got one from his bathroom medicine cabinet. Without a word of explanation Clerkin hurried out the front door. When he came back a few minutes later he was grinning. The temperature of the water in the radiator of Cole's car, he told us, was 101$\frac{3}{10}$°.

"It stands to reason," he said, "that the motor has been run this evening, since it's bitterly cold out."

I think we were all thoroughly pleased at this discovery. The tension suddenly relaxed. It had been too much for poor Dennis, however. He covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

I suppose you gentlemen are thinking that there was still one bit of damaging evidence against Cole — the fact that only his and his uncle's finger-marks were on the paring knife. As a matter of fact, we didn't know this at the time, as the captain had given orders that neither the knife nor the body was to be touched. But as Dennis had admitted handling it, the fact would have made little difference in Clerkin's reconstruction of the affair. It was pretty obvious, to his way of thinking, that someone had deliberately tried to frame Dennis.

"The guy who did the killing," Sergeant Clerkin explained confidently, "came in through the window. The old gent must have been pretty drunk if he was tight when he got here and then put himself on the outside of that pint of rye. He was probably too groggy to know much of anything. The guy has on gloves, of course. He stabs Lewis Cole with the knife that Dennis Cole had left on the table. There's no noise, so he can take his time and frame up a pretty picture for the cops. Putting hot water in the ice-cube tray was smart all right, but he pulled a boner by not making more ashes and by not taking away the clipped off parts of the cigars. If he'd done that and had wrapped the dead man's fingers around the glass so's to leave his prints, Mr. Cole here sure would of been out of luck. But no prints on a glass that's been used — that was dumb of him. Still, he had me guessing for a while," Clerkin added magnanimously.

Saunders smiled at us in the gently ironic way he has, and continued: Gentlemen, you perceive that much of the circumstantial evidence against Dennis Cole in the beginning seems now beyond reasonable doubt to estab-

lish his innocence. At all events, if you were members of a jury, you would refuse to send him to the chair. Is he not, in our charitable and "rational minds," the victim of an outrageously vicious plot?

However, you may accept my assurance that he was not! — as we very quickly learned. As the sergeant was finishing his analysis of the case, there was a knock at the door. Conrad Phelps went to answer it, expecting to admit the men from headquarters. But instead, in walked a tall pasty-faced man of about sixty.

"Excuse me," he said, taking off his derby hat. "I thought maybe there was something amiss here when I saw your uniform, Officer."

"What do you want?" Phelps asked gruffly.

"My name's Anderson, Philip Anderson," the stranger introduced himself. "I live in the building next door. When I saw you were a police officer I thought perhaps there was something wrong."

"Yes," Phelps said guardedly, "something is wrong. Have you seen or heard anything unusual connected with this apartment tonight?"

"Yes, I have. What I saw was very funny. You see, my apartment's directly opposite that window." Anderson nodded towards the west window. "I generally mind my own business. And that's what my wife advised me to do when I told her what I'd seen. But when you arrived and looked like cops. . . ."

"What did you see?" Conrad asked eagerly. "Did someone climb through that window?"

"Yes."

"Could you see clearly enough to identify the person?"

"Certainly. It was this young man here." Anderson pointed a bony finger at Dennis Cole!

"You say you saw Mr. Cole climb in his own window?" Phelps was incredulous.

"Oh, yes. I've often seen this gentleman moving about in here. If the shade is up and the light on, over half the room is in clear view. You don't mean to look, but you just can't help seeing at times."

He paused to look about at what were apparently familiar objects to him. In doing so he suddenly perceived the sprawled figure on the couch.

"Good grief," he gasped. "Was he *killed?*"

"Presumably," said Phelps. "Now, please tell us exactly what you saw."

It was a minute or two before old Anderson regained sufficient composure

to obey.

"I went into my bedroom a little before ten to get a handkerchief," he began finally. "I was about to switch on the light when that window shade was raised, letting enough light come through my window for me to see in here. Of course its going up suddenly that way attracted my attention. I glanced over here and saw Mr. Dennis Cole — of course I didn't know his name then — standing at the window. He couldn't see me, I suppose, because my room was dark. I was about to go on about my business when I noticed what he was doing."

"What was he doing?" demanded Phelps.

"He was hammering the lock of the window. At first I thought it had stuck and he was trying to loosen it. But he struck it some awful blows, and then flung the window up and climbed out on the little balcony, pulling the window shut after him. Then he worked at the bottom of the window on the outside for a minute or two. I couldn't see just what he was doing because his back was to me. . . . When he finished he climbed back into the room and to my surprise reached out, picked up one of the pots of ivy and threw it down onto the roof below; then he closed the window. Well, I thought he must be drunk, and kept watching. He went straight over to the telephone there and started to dial a number, but I guess he changed his mind for he put the receiver on the hook again and went off that way!" Anderson pointed towards the rear of the apartment. "I can't see that side of the room from my place. When he came back he dumped something into that green jar, and wiped a glass with his handkerchief, and then did the strangest thing of all. He began taking cigars out of a box, cutting them in half, and then smoking a few puffs of each.

"Well, just then my wife called to me and I went back to the living-room, and told her about it all. Like I told you, she said to forget it; and we went on reading. After a while I guess curiosity got the better of her — you know how women are — and she went in to take a look for herself, and I followed her into the bedroom. That's when we saw that the police were here and decided something serious might have happened and that I'd best come over. Of course we never guessed a murder. . . ."

Dennis Cole's collapse at that moment interrupted Anderson. I had noticed him swaying a little while Anderson had been talking. I think it was the word *murder* that finished Dennis. His face suddenly turned gray, and he crumpled to the floor without a sound. It must have been a mercy to

pass out, for you can imagine how he had been suffering.

While Conrad and I splashed water in his face and tried to bring him to, Clerkin took Anderson's address, asked him a few more questions, and sent him home. We finally got poor Dennis out of it. It's funny, but at such times you can't feel anything but the most terrible pity for a human being no matter what he's done. It's a kind of onlooker's embarrassment. Naturally he saw his goose was cooked. You see, he'd made up all that business about telephoning the captain and not getting an answer — he had to account for fifteen minutes some way. It was clever of him, because he knew that Conrad lived alone and that since he was at the station house his apartment would be empty. He confessed that readily enough, and he admitted he'd set the stage to fool the police. That was devilishly ingenious of him — to frame himself so that it would look as if someone else had *tried* to frame him.

Saunders paused and for a moment looked meditatively at the tips of his fingers.

"There you are, Gentlemen of the Jury," he said, looking suddenly up at us. "You are sufficiently familiar with the details of the case, so it's unnecessary for me to review it. What's the verdict?"

"I suppose anyone but a sophist would be convinced of Cole's guilt," snapped Sid Northwright.

"I don't think you suppose anything of the sort," Saunders smiled. "I imagine you're *tired* supposing. Your mind has become stagnant. All your minds have been dutifully following the path of least resistance. If you were a jury you would find Dennis Cole guilty, of course. When you say you are 'convinced' by the evidence, you are gratefully grasping at a straw."

"Wait a minute. Did Cole explain in his confession how he managed the tepid water in the radiator of his car?" Sid Northwright interrupted.

"Don't misunderstand," Saunders murmured. "I didn't say Cole confessed to having murdered his uncle. I said he confessed to having lied about phoning and fixing the cigars, and pouring warm water into the ice tray and those things. As for the water in the radiator, Cole insisted he'd driven out to Flushing and that the rest of his story was true. The pitiful hopelessness of it! I tell you it wrung my heart. He said that when he got back and found his uncle, he knew he couldn't possibly establish an alibi. He was in a panic. He searched all over for evidence of someone's having been there. There wasn't any. So he decided to manufacture some. But he mustn't be

too obvious about it. He decided that the one thing no one would suspect was that he could be such a fool as to frame himself. That was his story. Believe it if you can."

"Well, was he convicted?" I demanded. It was already two-thirty and I should have been back at my office. I am not one of the more chronic idlers of the Idlers' Club.

"No," Saunders said. "The contingent arrived from headquarters: photographers, a fingerprint expert, a doctor, and a couple of sleuths. The reporters were stopped in the lobby. The medical examiner was going over to examine the body when Captain Phelps objected. He wanted the pictures taken first. So they rigged up their paraphernalia and the flash light went off blindingly. They were taking poor Dennis out at that moment and it sent his nerves sky-high. He let out the most blood-curdling whoop I've ever heard. *And Mr. Lewis Cole sat up on the couch.*"

"What!" Sid Northwright gasped. "He wasn't *dead?*"

"No, just profoundly drunk, though he'd slept most of it off by then."

"But where'd all the blood come from?" Sid demanded indignantly.

"There wasn't much blood," Saunders said calmly. "Most of it was burgundy. The old boy had tried to open a bottle with the paring knife. He was too plastered to find the corkscrew under the table. The knife slipped and cut his lip. So he held the bottle under his coat to keep it from sliding out of his sweaty hands. Then the knife slipped again and cut a gash in his coat. Finally he managed to jam the cork down the neck of the bottle. All he could remember after that was staggering over to the couch.

"The bottle fell out when he sat up, blinking at us like a rummy old hoot-owl."

As I was on my way to my office the following morning, someone gripped my elbow from behind. Turning, I saw Sid Northwright. He was scowling, in a temper, and obviously out for blood.

"Look here!" Sid said disagreeably. "That story your wise friend Saunders told us yesterday — it's *preposterous.*"

"So?" I said.

"Why, look here! I got to thinking it over, and called up my doctor. He says the blood would have coagulated and that a man that drunk would have been snoring, or at least breathing heavily. They were there a long time — why didn't they hear the breathing? Besides, the captain — what

was his name? — Saunders's cousin — would have felt for the pulse or the heart beat. According to Saunders neither the police captain or the sergeant even went *near* Lewis Cole ——"

"Hold it, Sid!" I said. "Don't you know who Jeff Saunders is?"

"Of course I do. He's what I consider a greatly overrated criminal lawyer. That's what makes it so —"

"No, not his profession. His avocation, Sid. His hobby."

Sid looked at me blankly. "What's his hobby got to do with it?"

I concealed a smile.

"I thought you knew," I said. "Jeff Saunders in his spare time is the second vice-president of the Tall Stories Club."

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the 3 Amateurs *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"You lads," Professor Fordney pointed to three members of his class in Criminology at the University, — "have earned a special assignment, so I'm going to give you a chance of doing some real detective work. There's a small-time crook named Tom Fetz holed up in *The Swan*," Fordney continued. "He and his moll pulled a small job a few days ago and as she took the loot, I know they will contact each other shortly. Tom is broke. I want you three to tail Fetz 24 hours a day. We can pull him in anytime we want, but it's the girl, Mae Carter, the police are interested in. Tail Fetz and he'll lead you to her." . . .

Working singly, in 8-hour shifts, the three students tailed Fetz every moment from the time he left *The Swan* — which had only one entrance — until he returned. Daily they reported that Fetz and the girl had not made contact. They were positive of it. Fordney frowned. He was disappointed in his boys. Well, he'd have to show them. . . .

"I've been waiting for you," grimly smiled the Professor as the startled Mae shut Fetz's door behind her. "Been seeing Fetz quite a bit, haven't you?"

"Yeah," snarled Mae, "and with three bulls tailin' him!"

What is the only way Mae and Fetz could freely have met despite the students' surveillance?

Solution

When the Professor learned his three students were tailing Fetz singly in 8-hour shifts, he immediately knew the simple, effective ruse Fetz and Mae must have employed.

Mae, who of course knew Fetz was being tailed, would watch from a secluded spot until she saw Fetz leave the hotel *followed by his tailer*. Then she would slip into the hotel, go to Fetz's room, and wait until his tailer saw him safely back in the hotel! When she was ready to leave, Fetz would merely take another walk — his tailer closely following. When they were out of sight Mae would leave the hotel! Thus Fordney's capture of the woman was a very simple matter.

Here is one of the two stories which Willard Huntington Wright (S. S. Van Dine), in his Introduction to the anthology of detective stories which he edited, miscalled an Uncle Abner story. While Van Dine was incorrect in fact, he was correct in spirit; for the detective of "The Fortune Teller" bears a great resemblance to the great Uncle Abner created by the same author, Melville Davisson Post.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

IT WAS A big sunny room. The long windows looked out on a formal garden, great beech trees and the bow of the river. Within it was a sort of library. There were bookcases built into the wall, to the height of a man's head, and at intervals between them, rising from the floor to the cornice of the shelves, were rows of mahogany drawers with glass knobs. There was also a flat writing table.

It was the room of a traveler, a man of letters, a dreamer. On the table were an inkpot of carved jade, a paperknife of ivory with gold butterflies set in; three bronze storks, with their backs together, held an exquisite Japanese crystal.

The room was in disorder — the drawers pulled out and the contents ransacked.

My father stood leaning against the casement of the window, looking out. The lawyer, Mr. Lewis, sat in a chair beside the table, his eyes on the violated room.

"Pendleton," he said, "I don't like this Englishman Gosford."

The words seemed to arouse my father out of the depths of some reflection, and he turned to the lawyer, Mr. Lewis.

"Gosford!" he echoed.

"He is behind this business, Pendleton," the lawyer, Mr. Lewis, went on. "Mark my word! He comes here when Marshall is dying; he forces his way to the man's bed; he puts the servants out; he locks the door. Now, what business had this Englishman with Marshall on his deathbed? What business of a secrecy so close that Marshall's son is barred out by a locked door?"

He paused and twisted the seal ring on his finger.

"When you and I came to visit the sick man, Gosford was always here, as though he kept a watch upon us, and when we left, he went always to this room to write his letters, as he said.

"And more than this, Pendleton; Marshall is hardly in his grave before Gosford writes me to inquire by what legal process the dead man's papers may be examined for a will. And it is Gosford who sends a negro riding, as if the devil were on the crupper, to summon me in the name of the Commonwealth of Virginia, to appear and examine into the circumstances of this burglary.

"I mistrust the man. He used to hang about Marshall in his life, upon some enterprise of secrecy; and now he takes possession and leadership in his affairs, and sets the man's son aside. In what right, Pendleton, does this adventurous Englishman feel himself secure?"

My father did not reply to Lewis's discourse. His comment was in another quarter.

"Here is young Marshall and Gaeki," he said.

The lawyer rose and came over to the window.

Two persons were advancing from the direction of the stables — a tall, delicate boy, and a strange old man. The old man walked with a quick, jerky stride. It was the old country doctor Gaeki. And, unlike any other man of his profession, he would work as long and as carefully on the body of a horse as he would on the body of a man, snapping out his quaint oaths, and in a stress of effort, as though he struggled with some invisible creature for its prey. The negroes used to say that the devil was afraid of Gaeki, and he might have been, if to disable a man or his horse were the devil's will. But I think, rather, the negroes imagined the devil to fear what they feared themselves.

"Now, what could bring Gaeki here?" said Lewis.

"It was the horse that Gosford overheated in his race to you," replied my father. "I saw him stop in the road where the negro boy was leading the horse about, and then call young Marshall."

"It was no fault of young Marshall, Pendleton," said the lawyer. "But, also, he is no match for Gosford. He is a dilettante. He paints little pictures after the fashion he learned in Paris, and he has no force or vigor in him. His father was a dreamer, a wanderer, one who loved the world and its frivolities, and the son takes that temperament, softened by his mother. He ought to have a guardian."

"He has one," replied my father.

"A guardian!" repeated Lewis. "What court has appointed a guardian for young Marshall?"

"A court," replied my father, "that does not sit under the authority of Virginia. The helpless, Lewis, in their youth and inexperience, are not wholly given over to the spoiler."

The boy they talked about was very young — under twenty, one would say. He was blue-eyed and fair-haired, with thin, delicate features, which showed good blood long inbred to the loss of vigor. He had the fine, open, generous face of one who takes the world as in a fairy story. But now there was care and anxiety in it, and a furtive shadow, as though the lad's dream of life had got some rude awakening.

At this moment the door behind my father and Lewis was thrown violently open, and a man entered. He was a person with the manner of a barrister, precise and dapper; he had a long, pink face, pale eyes, and a close-cropped beard that brought out the hard lines of his mouth. He bustled to the table, put down a sort of portfolio that held an inkpot, a writing-pad and pens, and drew up a chair like one about to take the minutes of a meeting. And all the while he apologized for his delay. He had important letters to get off in the post, and to make sure, had carried them to the tavern himself.

"And now, sirs, let us get about this business," he finished, like one who calls his assistants to a labor.

My father turned about and looked at the man.

"Is your name Gosford?" he said in his cold, level voice.

"It is, sir," replied the Englishman, "— Anthony Gosford."

"Well, Mr. Anthony Gosford," replied my father, "kindly close the door that you have opened."

Lewis plucked out his snuffbox and trumpeted in his many-colored handkerchief to hide his laughter.

The Englishman, thrown off his patronizing manner, hesitated, closed the door as he was bidden — and could not regain his fine air.

"Now, Mr. Gosford," my father went on, "why was this room violated as we see it?"

"It was searched for Peyton Marshall's will, sir," replied the man.

"How did you know that Marshall had a will?" said my father.

"I saw him write it," returned the Englishman, "here in this very room,

on the eighteenth day of October, 1854."

"That was two years ago," said my father. "Was the will here at Marshall's death?"

"It was. He told me on his deathbed."

"And it is gone now?"

"It is," replied the Englishman.

"And now, Mr. Gosford," said my father, "how do you know this will is gone unless you also know precisely where it was?"

"I do know precisely where it was, sir," returned the man. "It was in the row of drawers on the right of the window where you stand — the second drawer from the top. Mr. Marshall put it there when he wrote it, and he told me on his deathbed that it remained there. You can see, sir, that the drawer has been rifled."

My father looked casually at the row of mahogany drawers rising along the end of the bookcase. The second one and the one above were open; the others below were closed.

"Mr. Gosford," he said, "you would have some interest in this will, to know about it so precisely."

"And so I have," replied the man, "it left me a sum of money."

"A large sum?"

"A very large sum, sir."

"Mr. Anthony Gosford," said my father, "for what purpose did Peyton Marshall bequeath you a large sum of money? You are no kin; nor was he in your debt."

The Englishman sat down and put his fingers together with a judicial air.

"Sir," he began, "I am not advised that the purpose of a bequest is relevant, when the bequest is direct and unencumbered by the testator with any indicatory words of trust or uses. This will bequeaths me a sum of money. I am not required by any provision of the law to show the reasons moving the testator. Doubtless, Mr. Peyton Marshall had reasons which he deemed excellent for this course, but they are, sir, entombed in the grave with him."

My father looked steadily at the man, but he did not seem to consider his explanation, nor to go any further on that line.

"Is there another who would know about this will?" he said.

"This effeminate son would know," replied Gosford, a sneer in the epithet, "but no other. Marshall wrote the testament in his own hand, with-

out witnesses, as he had the legal right to do under the laws of Virginia. The lawyer," he added, "Mr. Lewis, will confirm me in the legality of that."

"It is the law," said Lewis. "One may draw up a holograph will if he likes, in his own hand, and it is valid without a witness in this State, although the law does not so run in every commonwealth."

"And now, sir," continued the Englishman, turning to my father, "we will inquire into the theft of this testament."

But my father did not appear to notice Mr. Gosford. He seemed perplexed and in some concern.

"Lewis," he said, "what is your definition of a crime?"

"It is a violation of the law," replied the lawyer.

"I do not accept your definition," said my father. "It is, rather, I think, a violation of justice — a violation of something behind the law that makes an act a crime. I think," he went on, "that God must take a broader view than Mr. Blackstone and Lord Coke. I have seen a murder in the law that was, in fact, only a kind of awful accident, and I have seen your catalogue of crimes gone about by feeble men with no intent except an adjustment of their rights. Their crimes, Lewis, were merely errors of their impractical judgment."

Then he seemed to remember that the Englishman was present.

"And now, Mr. Gosford," he said, "will you kindly ask young Marshall to come in here?"

The man would have refused, with some rejoinder, but my father was looking at him, and he could not find the courage to resist my father's will. He got up and went out, and presently returned followed by the lad and Gaeki. The old country doctor sat down by the door, his leather case of bottles by the chair, his cloak still fastened under his chin. Gosford went back to the table and sat down with his writing materials to keep notes. The boy stood.

My father looked a long time at the lad. His face was grave, but when he spoke, his voice was gentle.

"My boy," he said, "I have had a good deal of experience in the examination of the devil's work." He paused and indicated the violated room. "It is often excellently done. His disciples are extremely clever. One's ingenuity is often taxed to trace out the evil design in it, and to stamp it as a false piece set into the natural sequence of events."

He paused again, and his big shoulders blotted out the window.

"Every natural event," he continued, "is intimately connected with innumerable events that precede and follow. It has so many serrated points of contact with other events that the human mind is not able to fit a false event so that no trace of the joinder will appear. The most skilled workmen in the devil's shop are only able to give their false piece a blurred joinder."

He stopped and turned to the row of mahogany drawers beside him.

"Now, my boy," he said, "can you tell me why the one who ransacked this room, in opening and tumbling the contents of all the drawers about, did not open the two at the bottom of the row where I stand?"

"Because there was nothing in them of value, sir," replied the lad.

"What is in them?" said my father.

"Only old letters, sir, written to my father, when I was in Paris — nothing else."

"And who would know that?" said my father.

The boy went suddenly white.

"Precisely!" said my father. "You alone knew it, and when you undertook to give this library the appearance of a pillaged room, you unconsciously endowed your imaginary robber with the thing you knew yourself. Why search for loot in drawers that contained only old letters? So your imaginary robber reasoned, knowing what you knew. But a real robber, having no such knowledge, would have ransacked them lest he miss the things of value that he searched for."

He paused, his eyes on the lad, his voice deep and gentle.

"Where is the will?" he said.

The white in the boy's face changed to scarlet. He looked a moment about him in a sort of terror; then he lifted his head and put back his shoulders. He crossed the room to a bookcase, took down a volume, opened it and brought out a sheet of folded foolscap. He stood up and faced my father and the men about the room.

"This man," he said, indicating Gosford, "has no right to take all my father had. He persuaded my father and was trusted by him. But I did not trust him. My father saw this plan in a light that I did not see it, but I did not oppose him. If he wished to use his fortune to help our country in the thing which he thought he foresaw, I was willing for him to do it.

"But," he cried, "somebody deceived me, and I will not believe that it was my father. He told me all about this thing. I had not the health to fight for our country, when the time came, he said, and as he had no other son,

our fortune must go to that purpose in our stead. But my father was just. He said that a portion would be set aside for me, and the remainder turned over to Mr. Gosford. But this will gives all to Mr. Gosford and leaves me nothing!"

Then he came forward and put the paper in my father's hand. There was silence except for the sharp voice of Mr. Gosford.

"I think there will be a criminal proceeding here!"

My father handed the paper to Lewis, who unfolded it and read it aloud. It directed the estate of Peyton Marshall to be sold, the sum of fifty thousand dollars paid to Anthony Gosford and the remainder to the son.

"But there will be no remainder," cried young Marshall. "My father's estate is worth precisely that sum. He valued it very carefully, item by item, and that is exactly the amount it came to."

"Nevertheless," said Lewis, "the will reads that way. It is in legal form, written in Marshall's hand, and signed with his signature, and sealed. Will you examine it, gentlemen? There can be no question of the writing or the signature."

My father took the paper and read it slowly, and old Gaeki nosed it over my father's arm, his eyes searching the structure of each word, while Mr. Gosford sat back comfortably in his chair like one elevated to a victory.

"It is in Marshall's hand and signature," said my father, and old Gaeki nodded, wrinkling his face under his shaggy eyebrows. He went away still wagging his grizzled head, wrote a memorandum on an envelope from his pocket, and sat down in his chair.

My father turned now to young Marshall.

"My boy," he said, "why do you say that some one has deceived you?"

"Because, sir," replied the lad, "my father was to leave me twenty thousand dollars. That was his plan. Thirty thousand dollars should be set aside for Mr. Gosford, and the remainder turned over to me."

"That would be thirty thousand dollars to Mr. Gosford, instead of fifty," said my father.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy; "that is the way my father said he would write his will. But it was not written that way. It is fifty thousand dollars to Mr. Gosford, and the remainder to me. If it were thirty thousand dollars to Mr. Gosford, as my father said his will would be, that would have left me twenty thousand dollars from the estate; but giving Mr. Gosford fifty thousand dollars leaves me nothing."

"And so you adventured on a little larceny," sneered the Englishman.

The boy stood very straight and white.

"I do not understand this thing," he said, "but I do not believe that my father would deceive me. He never did deceive me in his life. I may have been a disappointment to him, but my father was a gentleman." His voice went up strong and clear. "And I refuse to believe that he would tell me one thing and do another!"

One could not fail to be impressed, or to believe that the boy spoke the truth.

"We are sorry," said Lewis, "but the will is valid and we cannot go behind it."

My father walked about the room, his face in reflection. Gosford sat at his ease, transcribing a note on his portfolio. Old Gaeki had gone back to his chair and to his little case of bottles; he got them up on his knees, as though he would be diverted by fingering the tools of his profession. Lewis was in plain distress, for he held the law and its disposition to be inviolable; the boy stood with a fine defiance, ennobled by the trust in his father's honor. One could not take his stratagem for a criminal act; he was only a child, for all his twenty years of life. And yet Lewis saw the elements of crime, and he knew that Gosford was writing down the evidence.

"Gosford," he said, "what scheme were you and Marshall about?"

"You may wonder, sir," replied the Englishman, continuing to write at his notes; "I shall not tell you."

"But I will tell you," said the boy. "My father thought that the states in this republic could not hold together very much longer. He believed that the country would divide, and the South set up a separate government. He hoped this might come about without a war. He was in horror of a war. He had traveled; he had seen nations and read their history, and he knew what civil wars were. I have heard him say that men did not realize what they were talking when they urged war."

He paused and looked at Gosford.

"My father was convinced that the South would finally set up an independent government, but he hoped a war might not follow. He believed that if this new government were immediately recognized by Great Britain, the North would accept the inevitable and there would be no bloodshed. My father went to England with this scheme. He met Mr. Gosford somewhere — on the ship, I think. And Mr. Gosford succeeded in convincing

my father that if he had a sum of money he could win over certain powerful persons in the English Government, and so pave the way to an immediate recognition of the Southern Republic by Great Britain. He followed my father home and hung about him, and so finally got his will. My father was careful; he wrote nothing; Mr. Gosford wrote nothing; there is no evidence of this plan; but my father told me, and it is true."

My father stopped by the table and lifted his great shoulders.

"And so," he said, "Peyton Marshall imagined a plan like that, and left its execution to a Mr. Gosford!"

The Englishman put down his pen and addressed my father.

"I would advise you, sir, to require a little proof for your conclusions. This is a very pretty story, but it is prefaced by an admission of no evidence, and it comes as a special pleading for a criminal act. Now, sir, if I chose, if the bequest required it, I could give a further explanation, with more substance; of moneys borrowed by the decedent in his travels and to be returned to me. But the will, sir, stands for itself, as Mr. Lewis will assure you."

Young Marshall looked anxiously at the lawyer.

"Is that the law, sir?"

"It is the law of Virginia," said Lewis, "that a will by a competent testator, drawn in form, requires no collateral explanation to support it."

My father seemed brought up in a *cul-de-sac*. His face was tense and disturbed. He stood by the table; and now, as by accident, he put out his hand and took up the Japanese crystal supported by the necks of three bronze storks. He appeared unconscious of the act, for he was in deep reflection. Then, as though the weight in his hand drew his attention, he glanced at the thing. Something about it struck him, for his manner changed. He spread the will out on the table and began to move the crystal over it, his face close to the glass. Presently his hand stopped, and he stood stooped over, staring into the Oriental crystal, like those practicers of black art who predict events from what they pretend to see in these spheres of glass.

Mr. Gosford, sitting at his ease, in victory, regarded my father with a supercilious, ironical smile.

"Sir," he said, "are you, by chance, a fortune-teller?"

"A misfortune-teller," replied my father, his face still held above the crystal. "I see here a misfortune to Mr. Anthony Gosford. I predict, from

what I see, that he will release this bequest of moneys to Peyton Marshall's son."

"Your prediction, sir," said Gosford, in a harder note, "is not likely to come true."

"Why, yes," replied my father, "it is certain to come true. I see it very clearly. Mr. Gosford will write out a release, under his hand and seal, and go quietly out of Virginia, and Peyton Marshall's son will take his entire estate."

"Sir," said the Englishman, now provoked into a temper, "do you enjoy this foolery?"

"You are not interested in crystal-gazing, Mr. Gosford," replied my father in a tranquil voice. "Well, I find it most diverting. Permit me to piece out your fortune, or rather your misfortune, Mr. Gosford! By chance you fell in with this dreamer Marshall, wormed into his confidence, pretended a relation to great men in England; followed and persuaded him until, in his ill-health, you got this will. You saw it written two years ago. When Marshall fell ill, you hurried here, learned from the dying man that the will remained and where it was. You made sure by pretending to write letters in this room, bringing your portfolio with ink and pen and a pad of paper. Then, at Marshall's death, you inquired of Lewis for legal measures to discover the dead man's will. And when you find the room ransacked, you run after the law."

My father paused.

"That is your past, Mr. Gosford. Now let me tell your future. I see you in joy at the recovered will. I see you pleased at your foresight in getting a direct bequest, and at the care you urged on Marshall to leave no evidence of his plan, lest the authorities discover it. For I see, Mr. Gosford, that it was your intention all along to keep this sum of money for your own use and pleasure. But alas, Mr. Gosford, it was not to be! I see you writing this release; and Mr. Gosford," — my father's voice went up full and strong, — "I see you writing it in terror — sweat on your face!"

"The Devil take your nonsense!" cried the Englishman.

My father stood up with a twisted, ironical smile.

"If you doubt my skill, Mr. Gosford, as a fortune- or rather a misfortune-teller, I will ask Mr. Lewis and Herman Gaeki to tell me what they see."

The two men crossed the room and stooped over the paper, while my

father held the crystal. The manner and the bearing of the men changed. They grew on the instant tense and fired with interest.

"I see it!" said the old doctor, with a queer foreign expletive.

"And I," cried Lewis, "see something more than Pendleton's vision. I see the penitentiary in the distance."

The Englishman sprang up with an oath and leaned across the table. Then he saw the thing.

My father's hand held the crystal above the figures of the bequest written in the body of the will. The focused lens of glass magnified to a great diameter, and under the vast enlargement a thing that would escape the eye stood out. The top curl of a figure 3 had been erased, and the bar of a 5 added. One could see the broken fibers of the paper on the outline of the curl, and the bar of the five lay across the top of the three and the top of the *o* behind it like a black lath tacked across two uprights.

The figure *3* had been changed to *5* so cunningly as to deceive the eye, but not to deceive the vast magnification of the crystal. The thing stood out big and crude like a carpenter's patch.

Gosford's face became expressionless like wood, his body rigid; then he stood up and faced the three men across the table.

"Quite so!" he said in his vacuous English voice. "Marshall wrote a *3* by inadvertence and changed it. He borrowed my penknife to erase the figure."

My father and Lewis gaped like men who see a penned-in beast slip out through an unimagined passage. There was silence. Then suddenly, in the strained stillness of the room, old Doctor Gaeki laughed.

Gosford lifted his long pink face, with its cropped beard bringing out the ugly mouth.

"Why do you laugh, my good man?" he said.

"I laugh," replied Gaeki, "because a figure *5* can have so many colors."

And now my father and Lewis were no less astonished than Mr. Gosford.

"Colors!" they said, for the changed figure in the will was black.

"Why, yes," replied the old man, "it is very pretty."

He reached across the table and drew over Mr. Gosford's memorandum beside the will.

"You are progressive, sir," he went on; "you write in iron-nutgall ink, just made, commercially, in this year of 'fifty-six by Mr. Stephens. But we write here as Marshall wrote in 'fifty-four, with logwood."

He turned and fumbled in his little case of bottles.

"I carry a bit of acid for my people's indigestions. It has other uses." He whipped out the stopper of his vial and dabbed Gosford's notes and Marshall's signature.

"See!" he cried. "Your writing is blue, Mr. Gosford, and Marshall's red!"

With an oath the trapped man struck at Gaeki's hand. The vial fell and cracked on the table. The hydrochloric acid spread out over Marshall's will. And under the chemical reagent the figure in the bequest of fifty thousand dollars changed beautifully; the bar of the 5 turned blue, and the remainder of it a deep purple-red like the body of the will.

"Gaeki," cried my father, "you have trapped a rogue!"

"And I have lost a measure of good acid," replied the old man. And he began to gather up the bits of his broken bottle from the table.

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Death Car *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"Listen, Shelby, we're going to have a show-down — now! Don't you think *I* know what's been going on between you and Myrtle? And you my friend!"

George Grange and Shelby Russell fought furiously as Myrtle Grange begged them to stop. A vicious blow knocked Grange to the ground. His head crashed against a rock.

"You've killed him! You've killed him!" Myrtle shrieked.

"He isn't dead — yet. But, if you're game. . . ."

"You . . . you mean. . . ?"

"Isn't our love worth it?"

Myrtle nodded. . . .

Fordney looked at the contents of Grange's pockets. Six $5 bills, 90 cents in small change, car keys, two handkerchiefs, check book, pencil, three smashed cigars, lighter empty of fuel, and a compass. At a sign, Shelby Russell continued:

"George, Myrtle and I came out here for a picnic — we've been friends for years. We were preparing lunch. I had my arm around Myrtle's waist. Suddenly George shouted accusations at me like a wild man; called Myrtle some vile names, ran to his car, started it, and ran it over the cliff!"

Myrtle sobbed uncontrollably.

Thinking of Grange's broken body, taken from the twisted, battered car twenty minutes earlier, the criminologist inspected the spot where it had stood. He nodded twice, murmured, "Quite," then asked: "How long after you arrived here did the tragedy occur?"

Russell and Myrtle said it was at least half an hour.

The Professor shook his head, quietly said, "This was no suicide; book these two for murder, Sheriff."

What single clue disproved Russell's story and proved Grange had been murdered?

Solution

The car keys *in* Grange's pocket told Fordney Russell's story was a lie, that Grange had *not* driven his car over the cliff as he said. If he had, the keys would have been *in* the switch. So Russell and Myrtle must have put Grange's unconscious body in his car and *shoved* it over the cliff. In their haste and panic they simply didn't think of the keys!

The League of Forgotten Men

NUMBER 1:

Frederick Irving Anderson's MR. WHITE

Should auld acquaintance be forgot? Your Editors do not think so. Beginning with this issue, therefore, we inaugurate a new department, The League of Forgotten Men, formed to bring back to you in each issue a fiction detective out of the past.

The charm of these old-timers is well worth recapturing. The League of Forgotten Men includes such sterling sleuths as Carolyn Wells's BERT BAYLISS (1911); Hugh Pendexter's MR. EZRA STACKPOLE BUTTERWORTH (1913); Percy Brebner's CHRISTOPHER QUARLES (1914); George Barton's BROMLEY BARNES (1911); Arthur Crabb's SAMUEL LYLE (1920); Hesketh Pritchard's NOVEMBER JOE (1912); and numerous others. We intend to bring them back to you.

From time to time, the title of this department might appear as:

The League of Forgotten Women

for there are some lady sleuths who lie in limbo, too, and deserve to be resurrected. We shall bring you F. Tennyson Jesse's SOLANGE FONTAINE, Gilbert Frankau's KYRA SOKRATESCO, and other lady members of the League.

The first forgotten man we have selected to bring back to you is Frederick Irving Anderson's MR. WHITE, in a story called — felicitously — "The Unknown Man." "The Unknown Man" appeared originally in Adventure Magazine in August of 1911 — thirty-one years ago! — and has not been reprinted since.

We find this story especially interesting for two reasons: It was Frederick Irving Anderson's first attempt in the field of detective fiction; therefore MR. WHITE antedates Mr. Anderson's other and infinitely better-known detective and rogue characters: Deputy Parr, Oliver Armiston, the Infallible Godahl, and the Notorious Sophie Lang. And second, "The Unknown Man" could have been written yesterday; it has a timeless, universal quality.

So meet an old detective who to most will be a new detective — our first member of The League of Forgotten Men — MR. WHITE.

THE UNKNOWN MAN

by FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

He sat in his chair in the dark, fully dressed, all through the night, turning over and over in his mind the event which had at length come to pass. He was not superstitious. There was nothing supernatural about life, he had proved that with a simple twist of the wrist. There was nothing supernatural about death; else it should be haunting him now. But he was selfish. Revenge had belonged to him, and he would enjoy it. Retribution had belonged to him, and he had exacted it. The slate was clean. What claim had the law on him?

Dawn filtered through the slanting vanes of the Venetian blinds, cold, chilly dawn, and found him heavy-headed.

First came the milkman with rattling wagon and clinking bottles. He watched him through the blinds. A policeman was standing at the gate, swinging his club. Drud watched him — at first, shocked; then, when his faculties reasoned, with complacence. Surely human ingenuity could not so readily have unraveled the knot of circumstance with which he had surrounded his work! Yet, a policeman stood there — at his gate.

Ten minutes passed. A vague dread took hold of the watcher. He shivered. Why should he shiver, he asked himself? Was he so weak, then, so ill prepared, that so trivial an incident, a mere suggestion, should upset his equilibrium?

He drew himself together with an effort. But the thought would not down. He asked himself why. This was why. Men of the law henceforth were his enemies. There was something cold and hard in this fact, that forced it home on his senses. He had not thought of it before; that is, not in the same way. This man at his gate was his enemy. Every minion of the law was his enemy. They would not know it, when they passed him in the street. But he would.

The policeman moved on, unconscious of the eyes that watched him through the shutters.

The newsboy came soon. He was no sooner out of sight than Drud opened the door boldly and picked up his bundle of morning papers. Eagerly he

searched them. No, there was nothing there about him; except, scattered here and there, the words crime, murder, justice, fugitive, prison — all shockingly intense terms this morning. But there was nothing about *him*. Why should there have been? It was only a few hours since he had washed his hands of this affair. Still, newspapers are such wonderful organizations. They might have had at least a line in all these columns of jumble.

But wait! His fingers tingled. Here, in a remote corner, under an advertisement, was a paragraph, in fine type. It was about an Unknown Man.

Is there anything so various as the Unknown Man? He is here, there, everywhere, the same day, the same hour. And usually dead. This one was. A police sergeant had reported him as washed up on the tide at the Inlet, at one in the morning. Three lines in fine type! What a slender tomb!

Drud heard the housemaid moving about the kitchen. He hurriedly undressed himself and crept into bed. It was Sunday morning and he would not be disturbed until late.

He awoke at ten, surprised to find that he had been asleep. He breakfasted in his dressing-gown, a luxury he allowed himself on the first day of the week, and read his papers before taking his tub.

Again he searched the columns. But there was nothing; only the chance three lines. He smiled grimly. All of his ingenious plotting of months, all of the infinite exertion of his brain, to rob his victim first of identity, then of life, was summed up here in three lines of microscopic type!

There was just the suggestion of the smug about his smile, as he stepped out into the cold Winter drizzle at dusk and walked to his club, where he would dine.

Duke Bryson was late for dinner. There was nothing unusual in this, Duke being a pillar of the press, a slave of the public pulse. So Drud gave himself over to his vice, Gaboriau, and waited, not impatiently. He and Duke had taken Sunday dinner together ever since they had come on each other again, after several years lost beyond boyhood. Finally Duke came, two hours late, and they sat down in their own cosy corner.

"These are hard days for me," said Duke, by way of explaining his tardiness. "You know the big advertisers drop out after the holidays and leave an awful hole to be filled with news.

"Do you know," went on the editor, smiling whimsically as he set down his glass, "if I were ever to plot a crime, if I ever schemed justifiable murder — and naturally I would think it justifiable if I contemplated it — I would

be very particular about the season of the year."

"That sounds interesting," said Drud. He smiled, in spite of himself, though somewhat startled by the line the conversation had taken.

"Yes," went on Duke, "I would be very particular about the calendar. Now, for instance, this is the first week in January. I should say — and I know what I am talking about — that the average criminal has less chance of getting away with the goods the first week after Christmas and the first week after New Year's than during any other time in the year. If I were plotting to put a troublesome body out of my path, I would pick out the first three weeks in December, among several propitious periods in the calendar. People have more money to spend just before the holidays."

"You might get up an Almanac of Crime," suggested Drud, "like they have for the farmer, giving the changes of the moon, and heart-to-heart talks to criminals on when to sow and when to reap."

"I could do it," laughed Bryson. "Do you happen to know, for instance, that there are four times as many bank-robberies, defalcations I mean, in the month of April as in any other month in the year? But I am talking about murder. It is a good deal a question of space, and news to fill the space, when you come to avenging grisly crimes. Just before Christmas everybody has money. They save it to spend it at that time. That's why the big department stores angle for the surplus cash of the beloved public. They advertise. They hog every page in sight. We have to compress the news.

"Take our paper, for instance," went on Bryson. "During the month of December the city news department, of which I have the onerous honor of being the director, draws about eighteen columns out of the wreck, for all its regular local news.

"Now, I can't do much in the way of dishing up horrors during those three weeks when the Christmas spirit has got hold of everybody. I haven't room enough to turn around. And, take it from me, when the city editor hasn't room to turn around, the police take a nap. And the public are a good deal like the police. They decide that the newspaper doesn't think much of this murder, so they don't take any interest in it. If the newspapers are printing scare-heads and getting out a dozen extra editions in an afternoon, the detective bureau wakes up and takes off its coat. You can't blame them. You would probably do the same thing if you were a policeman. And when the police take only half an interest in a suspicious case, the criminal has twice as good a chance of getting away, hasn't he?"

"Yes," said Drud. "I never thought of it in that light before. It opens up an interesting question. Is there any more crime in January than in December?"

"No," said Bryson. "If you would examine the police blotters, you would find it runs about the same. But, on the other hand, if you read the newspapers, and didn't go beyond them, you couldn't help being struck by the slim crime *showing* just before Christmas. There *is* just as much crime, though. The only difference is that we don't spend so much time running it down, because if we did, we wouldn't have space to print it."

"Then, to come down to bed-rock," laughed Drud, "public morals, as the newspaper readers see it, depends on how much money the public is anxious to spend at any given time."

"It amounts to about that," said Bryson. "And the public are not half so indignant over crime if we smother it in a few inches of type as when we expand it by the yard."

Drud smiled and played with his glass.

"Yes," he said, "I believe that is true. We don't froth at the mouth unless you tell us to, on the first page, in big type. But," he added, as he adjusted the red shade of the electric candle by his plate. "How about the dull old saw you are so fond of quoting on your editorial page — 'Murder will out'?"

"Bosh!" snapped the city editor. This was his pet aversion, this old saw hung on the peg of an epigram.

"How big a percentage of murderers are ever brought to justice?" he cried, leaning over the table, and shaking his finger at his friend. "I don't know," he went on, without waiting for an answer. "But I can give a pretty good guess. Just about as big a percentage as there are smugglers brought to book. For every smuggler who is caught, a hundred slip through with the goods. It's about the same with murder. Have you ever noticed," he asked, "have you ever by any chance noticed the ubiquitous nature of our old friend, the Unknown Man?"

Drud stooped over to turn his bottle of wine in the ice, before he answered this question. "No," he said, casually. "I can't say that I have."

"He is a weird cuss," said Bryson. "He's all over town the same day. On the beach at Coney Island, on a bench in the park, bobbing in the wash of a ferryboat. The Morgue is full of him. I spike him by the dozen every day."

"Spike him?"

"Yes, kill him,"said the newspaper man, laughing. "When we throw out a piece of news that is commonplace or cheap, we say we 'spike' it, we 'kill' it. We keep a spindle on our desks for the purpose of impaling the trash. Sometimes we call it the 'dead hook.' We don't dare throw the stuff away until the day is done, because there is never any telling what later developments might arise to give importance to the smallest trifle.

"So we impale these poor devils by the dozen," went on Bryson. "In a big town like New York I suppose they will average a dozen a day. Usually they come to us as a police-blotter record. Three lines or so. How many of them," cried the city editor, pleased in having at length drawn his companion's interest, "do you believe died accidental deaths or by their own hand? How many of them do you believe are murdered?"

Drud dropped his eyes. "Well," he said finally, "what's the answer?"

"I don't know," answered Bryson. "That's the point. They are too obscure. Personally I believe the greater share of them are murdered. But there is no way of finding out. You could put a dozen of our best reporters on the trail of the tragedies of the Unknown Man and, unless there was something extraordinary about him, you wouldn't develop a single horror. The police-blotter descriptions are all too general, too vague, too much alike. You read Gaboriau," went on Bryson. "I'll wager that if your great Lecoq were a reporter in my office, he would 'spike' nine of ten Unknown Men that came along over the police wire. That's what becomes of your old saw that murder will out. There isn't one murder in ten discovered. I'm talking of a big city, of course, where we have millions of obscure people.

"But," he added, "we are wandering from the subject. What I started out to explain, when I began, was why I was late."

"Yes, you began by telling me it was safer to kill a man when the Christmas spirit suffused the land than to put it off until after the holidays, when all good citizens are broke and grouchy."

"Exactly," put in Bryson. "This is the first week in January. The business office sent me my usual chart this afternoon. In the first place, it is Sunday. In the second place, it is the lull after the holidays. Ads for Monday morning dropped sixty per cent. So little Willie here has to work with a fine-toothed comb. He has to find news. He has to fill his paper, and there is an awful big hole. Got to have some crime, of course. Nothing fills a hole like a mystery. So," concluded Bryson, "I worked two hours past dinner-time trying to find a mystery for to-morrow morning."

"And did you find it?"

"Yes. We found it."

"A murder?"

"Yes, a murder, and a dandy," said the city editor, biting off the end of his cigar. "I can't help thinking about the scientific villain who did it," he added. "He was a wonder. But it all goes to show that these scientific villains all slip up somewhere along the line. If he had only known, now, about the Christmas spirit we have just been talking about!"

"Who — who was it?"

"Our old friend," laughed Bryson. "The Unknown Man."

An involuntary exclamation escaped Drud. The lamp-shade threw a ruddy glow, but he felt that his face was white.

"We didn't 'spike' him this time," went on Bryson. 'We couldn't afford to. We didn't have news enough, so we hunted for a needle in a haystack. And," he cried in enthusiasm, "we found the needle!"

The two friends sat in silence, puffing at their cigars, Bryson alive with the recollections of a good day's work well done. Drud called a waiter to shut the transom. "I am cold," he said. "This rain brings out my malaria."

"Did you happen to read the *Record* this morning?" said Bryson, lighting a fresh cigar. "I don't suppose you did. Nobody does, on this side of the Bridge. Well, that's where our Unknown Man was entombed. I don't know how it happened. But there were three lines hidden away under an advertisement. He was found on the beach at the Inlet at one o'clock this morning."

"Yes? Yes?" cried Drud. And then, even more eagerly: "Bryson, you are confuting your own theories."

"No, I am not," said Bryson decidedly. "I am proving them by the exception. This is the one Unknown Man in ten. We wouldn't have taken the trouble to find him if people had been busy reading Christmas advertisements."

"Who is he — the Unknown Man?"

"I don't know."

"How do you know he was murdered?"

"We happen to have a Lecoq in our office," explained Bryson.

"You are confuting your own theories again," cried Drud, leaning back in his chair. "You have just been telling me that the master detectives are frauds when it comes to unraveling your obscure, average murders."

"Ah, yes. Obscure — there you have it. Do you know that nine out of

ten of our crimes are committed by professional criminals? The thug who smashes the skull of a pal in a dark alley with a bludgeon, or gives him dope, is the obscure. He usually goes free. Logic and deduction can't find him. Sherlock Holmes can't sit down in a dressing-gown with Doctor Watson and think *him* out of his hole!

"But," Bryson went on, jabbing the table-cloth with his finger. "Take the other kind of criminal — the cool, calculating amateur, the man of intellect, who seeks retribution, and who covers his crime with the chain of circumstance. He is the man we catch. The one dominating peculiarity of this kind of criminal is his egotism. Sherlock Holmes can catch him. Why? Because he doesn't kill on the impulse of the moment. He meditates. He premeditates. He schemes. Nine times out of ten, he overschemes. He loses his sense of proportion. His foot slips somewhere."

Drud drummed the table for a moment in silence. He was pleased to note that his nerves were behaving much better than they had this morning when he was annoyed by the policeman at his gate.

"I happened to see that paragraph you referred to," he said. "That man was drowned. There was nothing unusual about him."

"He was not drowned," retorted Bryson coldly. "That's just the point."

"How was he killed?" asked Drud.

"He was killed by a needle!"

Everything went black before his eyes. He gripped at the arms of his chair to hold himself from falling forward on the table. Dimly at first, then clearer, he heard the voice of Bryson, talking.

"We have a man on our staff named White," his friend was saying. "He is a wonder. Quiet, soft-spoken, never in any one's way. He was born a specialist. Besides that, he has intuition which amounts almost to clairvoyance at times. When he starts out to unravel a murder mystery, or a great robbery, the detectives whose names you see so much in the papers follow him. He never follows them. There was a horrible dismemberment case here in town about ten years ago. You may remember it. He found a piece of oil-cloth. When the murderer — a woman, by the way — arrived home one night, she found White sitting on her door-step waiting for her with that piece of oil-cloth. He had traced her by it."

Drud turned out the light by his place, and put his hands over his eyes.

"However," continued Bryson, "I am drifting from the subject again. When White came in this morning, he asked me if I didn't think there

might be something worth while in that chance paragraph in the *Record.* I told him to go ahead." Bryson chuckled. "You certainly never can tell," he said. "You are a surgeon, Drud, and this will interest you especially. Tell me, have you ever used cocaine, or any of its derivatives, in spinal anesthesia?"

It was so long before Drud gave any hint at having heard the question that Bryson repeated it.

"Yes, oh yes," he said finally, leaning his head on his hand as he spoke. "You may remember, I operated with Havenko himself when he was here last year, and then —" he paused, as the words came hard — "we have used it several times at the hospital, in exceptional cases."

"I am going to ask you a question," said Bryson. "It may sound queer to you, but you will understand, of course. Tell me," he said, leaning forward, "has it ever been your misfortune to kill a man with it?"

Drud sprang to his feet, his face livid. Bryson looked at him for a moment in astonishment, and then smiled and rose and gently put him back in his chair.

"It was rather a rash thing to ask a reputable surgeon," he said, self-accusingly. "Your profession makes such a god of its blamed ethics. Still, I have known surgeons who have admitted it."

Drud had no word in answer. He sat staring at his friend, feeble and abject.

"As I understand," went on Bryson, "if the fluid is injected in the lower region of the spinal-cord, it deadens temporarily the nerves controlling locomotion and the sense of touch, below that point. If you inject it too high in the spinal-cord, say in the back of the neck, you affect the nerves that control respiration and the heart-action. That's right, isn't it?"

Drud nodded, mechanically.

"And what happens if you so deaden the spinal-cord in the medullary region just below the brain, with cocaine, or stovaine, or tropacocaine, that the motor impulses are not carried back and forth?"

Bryson leaned forward upon the table eagerly, intent upon the development of his theories. Drud raised his eyes and looked at him a full minute before he answered. Then he said, in a dry voice: "The patient dies."

"Beautifully simple!" cried the enraptured man with the nose for news. "Hardly more than a pin-prick, the injection of the fluid, and the machine runs down and stops. By gad, Drud," he went on, pushing his chair against the wall and swinging one leg over the other, "do you know that I

gave White the merry laugh when he telephoned in that he had solved the mystery of the death of his Unknown Man, this floater, who would have been in Potter's Field by next Thursday if our advertisers had done right by us? I gave him the laugh when he told me he had unearthed the first murder on record by means of spinal anesthesia!

"Mind you," bubbled on the city editor, his voice vibrant with the thrill of discovery, "all he found on this man, who should have turned out like any ordinary poor devil of a corpse, was a pin-prick between the second and third vertebrae. The police didn't notice it. White telephoned to Dr. Carlos, and in less than an hour they had determined the cause of death beyond a suspicion of doubt. It's the greatest story since the Rice will case, and we have got the whole town beaten on it!"

With trembling fingers, slowly and almost in pain, Drud reached across the table and turned out the electric candle at Bryson's place. The light was red, and it seemed to crack his brain. His lower lip drooped until his mouth was half open. His eyes stared at the glistening cut-glass, seeing nothing. Before him, in his mind's eye, he beheld his ingenious fabric of circumstance rent to tatters. His skill, his cunning, his ingenuity, then, had come to nothing! A quiet, soft-spoken theorist had shattered without an effort the inner line of his defenses as if it had been of cards. Chance, idle, wandering chance, a day of the week, a number on a calendar had crushed him to earth; chance directed unwittingly, eagerly, by the hand of the one friend for whom he would have given his life!

He had but to look at Bryson, a thousand miles away in his exhilaration, blanketing himself with tobacco-smoke, to know that Bryson, least of all persons in the world, suspected that at this moment he was sitting opposite the quaking fugitive who in a few hours would be sought by all the world.

With an effort he managed to pull himself together. Just when he mastered his emotion and was a man again, a thought swept over him, possessed him, transformed him into a maniac. He began to laugh, shrilly. He half rose, propping himself up by one hand, and with the other thrusting an outstretched finger at his friend.

"Who — who is the murdered man?" he demanded.

Bryson slowly turned on Drud. He fanned away the tobacco-smoke. He looked sharply at his friend.

"For heaven's sake, Drud!" he said slowly. "What is the matter with you?"

"That's the way with you people!" cried Drud hysterically. "Do you wonder that you breed crime, foster crime, spread crime? Anything to fill your —— rags when you can't sell your columns for money! You jump at a fly! You find a pin-prick in the water-logged cadaver of some poor unfortunate devil who wanted to end his life in peace, and you seize the world by the ears and shriek bloody murder! You lie, you lie, you lie, you live on lies!"

Bryson reached across the table and caught Drud by both hands.

"Wait a minute," he said quietly. "Be still. Be quiet, for heaven's sake! Your nerves are all torn to tatters."

He spoke hurriedly to the waiter, who brought a pony of brandy, and he persuaded Drud to drink. The seizure passed off quickly, and left Drud with chattering teeth. Bryson helped him to a private parlor opening off the dining-room, and there the two friends sat for a long time, Bryson holding the clammy hand.

"You don't even know who killed him," mumbled Drud childishly.

Bryson was a bad nurse. His enthusiasm got the better of him. "No," he laughed, "but we will. I wouldn't be at all surprised if White were sitting on his doorstep now, waiting for him to come home." Then, recollecting himself: "I'll get a carriage and take you home, old chap," he said, rising and touching the bell. "You've been working yourself to death."

"No — no!" cried Drud. "I won't go home to-night! I'll stay here! You can tell Charlie to light the light in my room upstairs if you will, Duke, like a good fellow."

The attendant who answered the bell brought Bryson a card.

"Yes, yes," cried Bryson eagerly. "Send him right in."

A young man, with blue eyes set very wide apart and a nose like Louis Fourteenth's, entered quietly. It was White. He returned his chief's effusive greeting without a smile.

"This is Doctor Drud," said Bryson, pointing to his companion. "Doctor, here is the young man we have just been talking about. The Doctor has been ill, White,"

"I am very sorry for the Doctor," said White, looking sharply at the now grotesque figure. "I want just a word with him," he said to Bryson.

"Doctor," he began impersonally, as he took a seat beside Drud, "I have just come from Mr. Carson of the Surgical Appliance Company, and he tells me that his concern manufactures a special iridium needle for your

hypodermic sets. I have a fragment of one of them here."

He opened his hand and disclosed, lying in the palm, a tiny section of a tube of silvery metal, no bigger than a hair. Drud and Bryson stared at it in breathless silence. White rose, with an effort, as one tired with a day's work. Bryson was looking at him, his burning eyes faltering over a question he dared not utter.

"I am very sorry, indeed, sir," the young man said to his chief, "because I have long known the attachment you hold for him."

He turned to the door and nodded, and there entered two men, two men of the law, whom Drud only that morning had come to know as his enemies.

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Miser's Hoard *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

Professor Fordney swung back the door of the fire-proof safe which, though it had fallen through two floors, had landed in an almost upright position. He was surprised to find that the neat stacks of 10 and 20 dollar gold pieces amounted only to $6,000, that the currency total was only $9,000. It was generally known that miserly Frank Blatt always kept at least $100,000 in gold and bills in his safe. Further search failed to reveal a will Blatt's attorney said he had recently drawn.

The previous night the west wing of the Blatt house, occupied only by the master and his butler, had been gutted by fire. Both men were killed. The old man was notoriously careless in his smoking habits. Fordney turned to Blatt's nephew, Dale Carlton, who was in Boston when the fire started, but who arrived home before it had been extinguished. That young man smiled confidently. Old Chism, the gardener, had done his work well. He had the will — and the money. Let them ask their silly questions.

Fordney said, "The guard we put over the safe during the night —"

Carlton laughed. "He got himself blotto. I invited him in for a drink and he drank a quart." Fordney stared at the man's hands.

"Has this safe been touched since the fire?" he asked.

"No," replied Carlton.

"Know the combination?"

"No."

Fordney's eyes returned to Carlton's hands. The nail on the middle finger was broken.

"You," said the criminologist, "are under arrest for robbing the safe. Later the charge probably will be murder!"

What single clue told Fordney the safe had been robbed* after *the fire?

Solution

Carlton made the stupid mistake of *stacking* the coins he left in the safe after robbing it. Having fallen through two floors the coins would not have remained neatly stacked but would have been scattered in confusion on the safe floor. Under grilling the gardener, Chism, admitted firing the house on Carlton's orders. Carlton had agreed to pay him $20,000. Both men paid the supreme penalty.

This is the only short story in which Dr. Gideon Fell, celebrated sleuth of John Dickson Carr's novels, appears. We are happy to publish it here, in America, for the first time.

THE WRONG PROBLEM

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

At the Detectives' Club it is still told how Dr. Fell went down into the valley in Somerset that evening and of the man with whom he talked in the twilight by the lake, and of murder that came up as though from the lake itself. The truth about the crime has long been known, but one question must always be asked at the end of it.

The village of Grayling Dene lay a mile away towards the sunset. And the rear windows of the house looked out towards it. This was a long gabled house of red brick, lying in a hollow of the shaggy hills, and its bricks had darkened like an old painting. No lights showed inside, although the lawns were in good order and the hedges trimmed.

Behind the house there was a long gleam of water in the sunset, for the ornamental lake — some fifty yards across — stretched almost to the windows. In the middle of the lake, on an artificial island, stood a summer-house. A faint breeze had begun to stir, despite the heat, and the valley was alive with a conference of leaves.

The last light showed that all the windows of the house, except one, had little lozenge-shaped panes. The one exception was a window high up in a gable, the highest in the house, looking out over the road to Grayling Dene. It was barred.

Dusk had almost become darkness when two men came down over the crest of the hill. One was large and lean. The other, who wore a shovel-hat, was large and immensely stout, and he loomed even more vast against the skyline by reason of the great dark cloak billowing out behind him. Even at that distance you might hear the chuckles that animated his several chins and ran down the ridges of his waistcoat. The two travellers were engaged (as usual) in a violent argument. At intervals the larger one would stop and hold forth oratorically for some minutes, flourishing his cane. But, as they came down past the lake and the blind house, both of them stopped.

"There's an example," said Superintendent Hadley. "Say what you like, it's a bit too lonely for me. Give me the town —— "

"We are not alone," said Dr. Fell.

The whole place had seemed so deserted that Hadley felt a slight start when he saw a man standing at the edge of the lake. Against the reddish glow on the water they could make out that it was a small man in neat dark clothes and a white linen hat. He seemed to be stooping forward, peering out across the water. The wind went rustling again, and the man turned round.

"I don't see any swans," he said. "Can you see any swans?" The quiet water was empty.

"No," said Dr. Fell, with the same gravity. "Should there be any?"

"There should be one," answered the little man, nodding. "Dead. With blood on its neck. Floating there."

"Killed?" asked Dr. Fell, after a pause. He has said afterwards that it seemed a foolish thing to say; but that it seemed appropriate to that time between the lights of the day and the brain.

"Oh, yes," replied the little man, nodding again. "Killed, like others — human beings. Eye, ear and throat. Or perhaps I should say ear, eye and throat, to get them in order."

Hadley spoke with some sharpness.

"I hope we're not trespassing. We knew the land was enclosed, of course, but they told us that the owners were away and wouldn't mind if we took a short cut. Fell, don't you think we'd better ——?"

"I beg your pardon," said the little man, in a voice of such cool sanity that Hadley turned round again. From what they could see in the gloom, he had a good face, a quiet face, a somewhat ascetic face; and he was smiling. "I beg your pardon," he repeated in a curiously apologetic tone. "I should not have said that. You see, I have been far too long with it. I have been trying to find the real answer for 30 years. As for the trespassing myself, I do not own this land, although I lived here once. There is, or used to be, a bench here somewhere. Can I detain you for a little while?"

Hadley never quite realised afterwards how it came about. But such was the spell of the hour, or of the place, or the sincere, serious little man in the white linen hat, that it seemed no time at all before the little man was sitting on a rusty iron chair beside the darkening lake, speaking as though to his fingers.

"I am Joseph Lessing," he said in the same apologetic tone. "If you have not heard of me, I don't suppose you will have heard of my stepfather. But at one time he was rather famous as an eye, ear and throat specialist. Dr. Harvey Lessing, his name was.

"In those days we — I mean the family — always came down here to spend our summer holidays. It is rather difficult to make biographical details clear. Perhaps I had better do it with dates: as though the matter were really important, like a history book. There were four children. Three of them were Dr. Lessing's children by his first wife, who died in 1899. I was the step-son. He married my mother when I was 17, in 1901. I regret to say that *she* died three years later. Dr. Lessing was a kindly man, but he was very unfortunate in the choice of his wives."

The little man appeared to be smiling sadly.

"We were an ordinary, contented and happy group, in spite of Brownrigg's cynicism. Brownrigg was the eldest. Eye, ear and throat pursued us: he was a dentist. I think he is dead now. He was a stout man, smiling a good deal, and his face had a shine like pale butter. He was an athlete run to seed; he used to claim that he could draw teeth with his fingers. By the way, he was very fond of walnuts. I always seem to remember him sitting between two silver candlesticks at the table, smiling, with a heap of shells in front of him and a little sharp nut-pick in his hand.

"Harvey Junior was the next. They were right to call him Junior; he was of the striding sort, brisk and high-coloured and likeable. He never sat down in a chair without first turning it the wrong way round. He always said 'Ho, my lads!' when he came into a room, and he never went out of it without leaving the door open so that he could come back in again. Above everything, he was nearly always on the water. We had a skiff and a punt for our little lake — would you believe that it is ten feet deep? Junior always dressed for the part as solemnly as though he had been on the Thames, wearing a red-and-white striped blazer and a straw hat of the sort that used to be called a boater. I say he was nearly always on the water: but not, of course, after tea. That was when Dr. Lessing went to take his afternoon nap in the summer-house."

The summer-house, in its sheath of vines, was almost invisible now. But they all looked at it, very suggestive in the middle of the lake.

"The third child was the girl, Martha. She was almost my own age, and I was very fond of her."

Joseph Lessing pressed his hands together.

"I am not going to introduce an unnecessary love story, gentlemen," he said. "As a matter of fact, Martha was engaged to a young man who had a commission in a line regiment, and she was expecting him down here any day when — the things happened. Arthur Somers, his name was. I knew him well; I was his confidant in the family.

"I want to emphasise what a hot, pleasant summer it was. The place looked then much as it does now, except that I think it was greener then. I was glad to get away from the city. In accordance with Dr. Lessing's passion for 'useful employment,' I had been put to work in the optical department of a jeweller's. I was always skilful with my hands. I dare say I was a spindly, snappish, suspicious lad, but they were all very good to me after my mother died: except butter-faced Brownrigg, perhaps. But for me that summer centers round Martha, with her brown hair piled up on the top of her head, in a white dress with puffed shoulders, playing croquet on a green lawn and laughing. I told you it was a long while ago.

"On the afternoon of the fifteenth of August we had all intended to be out. Even Brownrigg had intended to go out after a sort of lunch-tea that we had at two o'clock in the afternoon. Look to your right, gentlemen. You see that bow window in the middle of the house, overhanging the lake? There was where the table was set.

"Dr. Lessing was the first to leave the table. He was going out early for his nap in the summer-house. It was a very hot afternoon, as drowsy as the sound of a lawn-mower. The sun baked the old bricks and made a flat blaze on the water. Junior had knocked together a sort of miniature landing-stage at the side of the lake — it was just about where we are sitting now — and the punt and the rowing-boat were lying there.

"From the open windows we could all see Dr. Lessing going down to the landing-stage with the sun on his bald spot. He had a pillow in one hand and a book in the other. He took the rowing-boat; he could never manage the punt properly, and it irritated a man of his dignity to try.

"Martha was the next to leave. She laughed and ran away, as she always did. Then Junior said, 'Cheerio, chaps' — or whatever the expression was then — and strode out leaving the door open. I went shortly afterwards. Junior had asked Brownrigg whether he intended to go out, and Brownrigg had said yes. But he remained, being lazy, with a pile of walnut shells in front of him. Though he moved back from the table to get out of the glare,

he lounged there all afternoon in view of the lake.

"Of course, what Brownrigg said or thought might not have been important. But it happened that a gardener named Robinson had taken it into his head to trim some hedges on this side of the house. He had a full view of the lake. And all that afternoon nothing stirred. The summer-house, as you can see, has two doors: one facing towards the house, the other in the opposite direction. These openings were closed by sun-blinds, striped red and white like Junior's blazer, so that you could not see inside. But all the afternoon the summer-house remained dead, showing up against the fiery water and that clump of trees at the far side of the lake. No boat put out. No one went in to swim. There was not so much as a ripple, any more than might have been caused by the swans (we had two of them), or by the spring that fed the lake.

"By six o'clock we were all back in the house. When there began to be a few shadows, I think something in the *emptiness* of the afternoon alarmed us. Dr. Lessing should have been there, demanding something. He was not there. We halloo'd for him, but he did not answer. The rowing boat remained tied up by the summer-house. Then Brownrigg, in his cool fetch-and-run fashion, told me to go out and wake up the old party. I pointed out that there was only the punt, and that I was a rotten hand at punting, and that whenever I tried it I only went round in circles or upset the boat. But Junior said, 'Come-along-old-chap-you-shall-improve-your-punting-I'll-give-you-a-hand.'

"I have never forgotten how long it took us to get out there while I staggered at the punt-pole, and Junior lent a hand.

"Dr. Lessing lay easily on his left side, almost on his stomach, on a long wicker settee. His face was very nearly into the pillow, so that you could not see much except a wisp of sandy side-whisker. His right hand hung down to the floor, the fingers trailing into the pages of '*Three Men in a Boat.*'

"We first noticed that there seemed to be some — that is, something that had come out of his ear. More we did not know, except that he was dead, and in fact the weapon has never been found. He died in his sleep. The doctor later told us that the wound had been made by some round sharp-pointed instrument, thicker than a hat-pin but not so thick as a lead-pencil, which had been driven through the right ear into the brain."

Joseph Lessing paused. A mighty swish of wind uprose in the trees beyond the lake, and their tops ruffled under clear starlight. The little man sat

nodding to himself in the iron chair. They could see his white hat move.

"Yes?" prompted Dr. Fell in an almost casual tone. Dr. Fell was sitting back, a great bandit-shape in cloak and shovel-hat. He seemed to be blinking curiously at Lessing over his eyeglasses. "And whom did they suspect?"

"They suspected me," said the little man.

"You see," he went on, in the same apologetic tone, "I was the only one in the group who could swim. It was my one accomplishment. It is too dark to show you now but I won a little medal by it, and I have kept it on my watch-chain ever since I received it as a boy."

"But you said," cried Hadley, "that nobody . . ."

"I will explain," said the other, "if you do not interrupt me. Of course, the police believed that the motive must have been money. Dr. Lessing was a wealthy man, and his money was divided almost equally among us. I told you he was always very good to me.

"First they tried to find out where every one had been in the afternoon. Brownrigg had been sitting, or said he had been sitting, in the dining-room. But there was the gardner to prove that not he or any one else had gone out on the lake. Martha (it was foolish, of course, but they investigated even Martha) had been with a friend of hers — I forget her name now — who came for her in the phaeton and took her away to play croquet. Junior had no alibi, since he had been for a country walk. But," said Lessing, quite simply, "everydody knew *he* would never do a thing like that. I was the changeling, or perhaps I mean ugly duckling, and I admit I was an unpleasant, sarcastic lad.

"This is how Inspector Deering thought I had committed the murder. First, he thought, I had made sure everybody would be away from the house that afternoon. Thus, later, when the crime was discovered, it would be assumed by everyone that the murderer had simply gone out in the punt and come back again. Everybody knew that I could not possibly manage a punt alone. You see?

"Next, the inspector thought, I had come down to the clump of trees across the lake, in line with the summer-house and the dining-room windows. It is shallow there, and there are reeds. He thought that I had taken off my clothes over a bathing-suit. He thought that I had crept into the water under cover of the reeds, and that I had simply swum out to the summer-house under water.

"Twenty odd yards under water, I admit, are not much to a good

swimmer. They thought that Brownrigg could not see me come up out of the water, because the thickness of the summer-house was between. Robinson had a full view of the lake, but he could not see that one part at the back of the summer-house. Nor, on the other hand, could I see them. They thought that I had crawled under the sun-blind with the weapon in the breast of my bathing-suit. Any wetness I might have left would soon be dried by the intense heat. That, I think, was how they believed I had killed the old man who befriended me."

The little man's voice grew petulant and dazed.

"I told them I did not do it," he said with a hopeful air. "Over and over again I told them I did not do it. But I do not think they believed me. That is why for all these years I have wondered —

"It was Brownrigg's idea. They had me before a sort of family council in the library, as though I had stolen jam. Martha was weeping, but I think she was weeping with plain fear. She never stood up well in a crisis, Martha didn't; she turned pettish and even looked softer. All the same, it is not pleasant to think of a murderer coming up to you as you doze in the afternoon heat. Junior, the good fellow, attempted to take my side and call for fair play; but I could see the idea in his face. Brownrigg presided, silkily, and smiled down his nose.

" 'We have either got to believe you killed him,' Brownrigg said, 'or believe in the supernatural. Is the lake haunted? No; I think we may safely discard that.' He pointed his finger at me. 'You damned young snake, you are lazy and wanted that money.'

"But, you see, I had one very strong hold over them — and I used it. I admit it was unscrupulous, but I was trying to demonstrate my innocence and we are told that the devil must be fought with fire. At mention of this hold, even Brownrigg's jowls shook. Brownrigg was a dentist, Harvey was studying medicine. What hold? That is the whole point. Nevertheless, it was not what the family thought I had to fear: it was what Inspector Deering thought.

"They did not arrest me yet, because there was not enough evidence, but every night I feared it would come the next day. Those days after the funeral were too warm; and suspicion acted like woollen underwear under the heat. Martha's tantrums got on even Junior's nerves. Once I thought Brownrigg was going to hit her. She very badly needed her fiancé, Arthur Somers; but, though he wrote that he might be there any day, he still could

not get leave of absence from his colonel.

"And then the lake got more food.

"Look at the house, gentlemen. I wonder if the light is strong enough for you to see it from here? Look at the house — the highest window there — under the gable. You see?"

There was a pause, filled with the tumult of the leaves.

"It's got bars," said Hadley.

"Yes," assented the little man. "I must describe the room. It is a little square room. It has one door and one window. At the time I speak of, there was no furniture at all in it. The furniture had been taken out some years before, because it was rather a special kind of furniture. Since then it had been locked up. The key was kept in a box in Dr. Lessing's room; but, of course, nobody ever went up there. One of Dr. Lessing's wives had died there in a certain condition. I told you he had bad luck with his wives. They had not even dared to have a glass window."

Sharply, the little man struck a match. The brief flame seemed to bring his face up towards them out of the dark. They saw that he had a pipe in his left hand. But the flame showed little except the gentle upward turn of his eyes, and the fact that his whitish hair (of such coarse texture that it seemed whitewashed) was worn rather long.

"On the afternoon of the twenty-second of August, we had an unexpected visit from the family solicitor. There was no one to receive him except myself. Brownrigg had locked himself up in his room at the front with a bottle of whisky; he was drunk or said he was drunk. Junior was out. We had been trying to occupy our minds for the past week, but Junior could not have his boating or I my workshop; this was thought not decent. I believe it was thought that the most decent thing was to get drunk. For some days Martha had been ailing. She was not ill enough to go to bed, but she was lying on a long chair in her bedroom.

"I looked into the room just before I went downstairs to see the solicitor. The room was muffled up with shutters and velvet curtains, as all the rooms decently were. You may imagine that it was very hot in there. Martha was lying back in the chair with a smelling-bottle, and there was a white-globed lamp burning on a little round table beside her. I remember that her white dress looked starchy; her hair was piled up on top of her head and she wore a little gold watch on her breast. Also, her eyelids were so puffed that they seemed almost oriental. When I asked her how she was, she began to cry

and concluded by throwing a book at me.

"So I went on downstairs. I was talking to the solicitor when it took place. We were in the library, which is at the front of the house, and in consequence we could not hear distinctly. But we heard something. That was why we went upstairs — and even the solicitor ran. Martha was not in her own bedroom. We found out where she was from the fact that the door to the garret-stairs was open.

"It was even more intolerably hot up under the roof. The door to the barred room stood half-way open. Just outside stood a housemaid (her name, I think, was Jane Dawson) leaning against the jamb and shaking like the ribbons on her cap. All sound had dried up in her throat, but she pointed inside.

"I told you it was a little, bare, dirty brown room. The low sun made a blaze through the window, and made shadows of the bars across Martha's white dress. Martha lay nearly in the middle of the room, with her heel twisted under her as though she had turned round before she fell. I lifted her up and tried to talk to her; but a rounded sharp-pointed thing, somewhat thicker than a hatpin, had been driven through the right eye into the brain.

"Yet there was nobody else in the room.

"The maid told a straight story. She had seen Martha come out of Dr. Lessing's bedroom downstairs. Martha was running, running as well as she could in those skirts; once she stumbled, and the maid thought that she was sobbing. Jane Dawson said that Martha made for the garret door as though the devil were after her. Jane Dawson, wishing anything rather than to be alone in the dark hall, followed her. She saw Martha come up here and unlock the door of the little brown room. When Martha ran inside, the maid thought that she did not attempt to close the door; but that it appeared to swing shut after her. You see?

"Whatever had frightened Martha, Jane Dawson did not dare follow her in — for a few seconds, at least, and afterwards it was too late. The maid could never afterwards describe exactly the sort of sound Martha made. It was something that startled the birds out of the vines and set the swans flapping on the lake. But the maid presently saw straight enough to push the door with one finger and peep round the edge.

"Except for Martha, the room was empty.

"Hence the three of us now looked at each other. The maid's story was

not to be shaken in any way, and we all knew she was a truthful witness. Even the police did not doubt her. She said she had seen Martha go into that room, but that she had seen nobody come out of it. She never took her eyes off the door — it was not likely that she would. But when she peeped in to see what had happened, there was nobody except Martha in the room. That was easily established, because there was no place where any one could have been. Could she have been blinded by the light? No. Could any one have slipped past her? No. She almost shook her hair loose by her vehemence on this point.

"The window, I need scarcely tell you, was inaccessible. Its bars were firmly set, no farther apart than the breadth of your hand, and in any case the window could not have been reached. There was no way out of the room except the door or the window; and no — what is the word I want? — no mechanical device in it. Our friend Inspector Deering made certain of that. One thing I suppose I should mention. Despite the condition of the walls and ceiling, the floor of the room was swept clean. Martha's white dress with the puffed shoulders had scarcely any dirt when she lay there; it was as white as her face.

"This murder was incredible. I do not mean merely that it was incredible with regard to its physical circumstances, but also that there was Martha dead — on a holiday. Possibly she seemed all the more dead because we had never known her well when she was alive. She was (to me, at least) a laugh, a few coquetries, a pair of brown eyes. You felt her absence more than you would have felt that of a more vital person. And — on a holiday with that warm sun, and the tennis-net ready to be put up.

"That evening I walked with Junior here in the dusk by the lake. He was trying to express some of this. He appeared dazed. He did not know why Martha had gone up to that little brown room, and he kept endlessly asking why. He could not even seem to accustom himself to the idea that our holidays were interrupted, much less interrupted by the murders of his father and his sister.

"There was a reddish light on the lake; the trees stood up against it like black lace, and we were walking near that clump by the reeds. The thing I remember most vividly is Junior's face. He had his hat on the back of his head, as he usually did. He was staring down past the reeds, where the water lapped faintly, as though the lake itself were the evil genius and kept its secret. When he spoke I hardly recognised his voice.

" 'God,' he said, 'but it's in the air!'

"There was something white floating by the reeds, very slowly turning round, with a snaky discoloured talon coming out from it along the water. the talon was the head of a swan, and the swan was dead of a gash across the neck that had very nearly severed it.

"We fished it out with a boathook," explained the little man as though with an afterthought. And then he was silent.

On the long iron bench Dr. Fell's cape shifted a little; Hadley could hear him wheezing with quiet anger, like a boiling kettle.

"I thought so," rumbled Dr. Fell. He added more sharply: "Look here, this tomfoolery has got to stop."

"I beg your pardon?" said Joseph Lessing, evidently startled.

"With your kind permission," said Dr. Fell, and Hadley has later said that he was never more glad to see that cane flourished or hear that common-sense voice grow fiery with controversy: "with your kind permission, I should like to ask you a question. Will you swear to me by anything you hold sacred (if you have anything, which I rather doubt) that you do not know the real answer?"

"Yes," replied the other seriously, and nodded.

For a little space, Dr. Fell was silent. Then he spoke argumentatively. "I will ask you another question, then. Did you ever shoot an arrow into the air?"

Hadley turned round. "I hear the call of mumbo-jumbo," said Hadley with grim feeling. "Hold on, now! You don't think that girl was killed by somebody shooting an arrow into the air, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Fell in a more meditative tone. He looked at Lessing. "I mean it figuratively — like the boy in the verse. Did you ever throw a stone when you were a boy? Did you ever throw a stone, not to hit anything, but for the sheer joy of firing it? Did you ever climb trees? Did you ever like to play pirate and dress up and wave a sword? I don't think so. That's why you live in a dreary, rarefied light; that's why you dislike romance and sentiment and good whisky and all the noblest things of this world; and it is also why you do not see the unreasonableness of several things in this case.

"To begin with, birds do not commonly rise up in a great cloud from the vines because some one cries out. With the hopping and always-whooping Junior about the premises, I should imagine the birds were used to it. Still

less do swans leap up out of the water and flap their wings because of a cry from far away; swans are not so sensitive. But did you ever see a boy throw a stone at a wall? Did you ever see a boy throw a stone at the water? Birds and swans would have been outraged only if something had *struck* both the wall and the water: something, in short, which fell from that barred window.

"Now, frightened women do not in their terror rush up to a garret, especially a garret with such associations. They go downstairs, where there is protection. Martha Lessing was not frightened. She went up to that room for some purpose. What purpose? She could not have been going to get anything, for there was nothing in the room to be got. What could have been on her mind? The only thing we know to have been on her mind was a frantic wish for her fiancé to get there. She had been expecting him for weeks. It is a singular thing about that room: but its window is the highest in the house, and commands the only good clear view of the road to the village.

"Now suppose some one had told her that he thought, he rather *thought*, he had glimpsed Arthur Somers coming up the road from the village. It was a long way off, of course, and the some one admitted he might have been mistaken in thinking so. . . .

"H'm, yes. The trap was all set, you see. Martha Lessing waited only long enough to get the key out of the box in her father's room, and she sobbed with relief. But, when she got to the room, there was a strong sun pouring through the bars straight into her face: and the road to the village is a long way off. That, I believe, was the trap. For on the window-ledge of that room (which nobody ever used, and which some one had swept so that there should be no footprints) this some one conveniently placed a pair of — eh, Hadley?"

"Field-glasses," said Hadley, and got up in the gloom.

"Still," argued Dr. Fell, wheezing argumentatively, "there would be one nuisance. Take a pair of field-glasses, and try to use them in a window where the bars are set more closely than the breadth of your hand. The bars get in the way: wherever you turn you bump into them; they confuse sight and irritate you; and, in addition, there is a strong sun to complicate matters. In your impatience, I think you would turn the glasses sideways and pass them out through the bars. Then, holding them firmly against one bar with your hands through the bars on either side, you would look through the eyepieces.

"But," said Dr. Fell, with a ferocious geniality, "those were no ordinary

glasses. Martha Lessing had noticed before that the lenses were blurred. Now that they were in position, she tried to adjust the focus by turning the little wheel in the middle. And as she turned the wheel, like the trigger of a pistol it released the spring mechanism and a sharp steel point shot out from the right-hand lens into her eye. She dropped the glasses, which were outside the window. The weight of them tore the point from her eye; and it was this object, falling, which gashed and broke the neck of the swan just before it disappeared into the water below."

He paused. He had taken out a cigar, but he did not light it.

"Busy solicitors do not usually come to a house 'unexpectedly.' They are summoned. Brownrigg was drunk and Junior absent; there was no one at the back of the house to see the glasses fall. For this time the murderer had to have a respectable alibi. Young Martha, the only one who could have been gulled into such a trap, had to be sacrificed — to avert the arrest which had been threatening some one ever since the police found out how Dr. Lessing really had been murdered.

"There was only one man who admittedly did speak with Martha Lessing only a few minutes before she was murdered. There was only one man who was employed as optician at a jeweller's, and admits he had his 'workshop' here. There was only one man skilful enough with his hands —" Dr. Fell paused, wheezing, and turned to Lessing. "I wonder they didn't arrest you."

"They did," said the little man, nodding. "You see, I was released from Broadmoor only a month ago."

There was a sudden rasp and crackle as he struck another match.

"You —" bellowed Hadley, and stopped. "So it was your mother who died in that room? Then what the hell do you mean by keeping us here with this pack of nightmares?"

"No," said the other peevishly. "You do not understand. I never wanted to know who killed Dr. Lessing or poor Martha. You have got hold of the wrong problem. And yet I tried to tell you what the problem was.

"You see, it was not *my* mother who died mad. It was theirs — Brownrigg's and Harvey's and Martha's. That was why they were so desperately anxious to think I was guilty, for they could not face the alternative. Didn't I tell you I had a hold over them, a hold that made even Brownrigg shake, and that I used it? Do you think they wouldn't have had me clapped into gaol straightaway if it had been *my* mother who was mad? Eh?

"Of course," he explained apologetically, "at the trial they had to swear

it was my mother who was mad; for I threatened to tell the truth in open court if they didn't. Otherwise I should have been hanged, you see. Only Brownrigg and Junior were left. Brownrigg was a dentist, Junior was to be a doctor, and if it had been known — But that is not the point. That is not the problem. Their mother was mad, but they were harmless. I killed Dr. Lessing. I killed Martha. Yes, I am quite sane. Why did I do it, all those years ago? Why? Is there no rational pattern in the scheme of things, and no answer to the bedevilled of the earth?"

The match curled to a red ember, winked and went out. Clearest of all they remembered the coarse hair that was like whitewash on the black, the eyes, and the curiously suggestive hands. Then Joseph Lessing got up from the chair. The last they saw of him was his white hat bobbing and flickering across the lawn under the blowing trees.

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Last Survivor *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"Thanks for your offer of assistance, Fordney," Attorney Harbord said.

"Sixteen months ago Christopher Cantwell, noted South American explorer; Frank Wilding, entomologist; physician Roger Burton; capitalist Mark Dalton; and big-game hunter Arthur Gibbon organized an expedition to a remote part of Brazil previously visited by Cantwell.

"I drew wills for all of them. Cantwell's, Wilding's, Burton's and Dalton's each provided in event of death his estate be divided equally among survivors of the group; that if all four died, heirs of the *last* to die should inherit the combined estates.

"Gibbon's will, however, left his estate to his nephew — unless he died on the expedition and was the *last* to die. In such event the Scott Museum was the beneficiary.

"Well, recently a native discovered deep in the Brazilian jungles the bodies of all five and," Harbord passed over a paper, "this scrawled, almost illegible and, to me, wholly unintelligible message. See what you make of it, professor."

Fordney studied the paper.

* * * said it was malaria * * * died first * * * followed * * * guides left us and * * * if I knew this country I might * * * wounded by natives * * * said no lions here but I'm afraid they'll get me, they * * * severely injured * * * he performed amputation and told me how to * * * I don't know if bug collection of value but * * * both died yesterday * * * getting weaker * * * dying * * *

The professor leaned back, and said, "The last man to die was ——"

Who? What proved his identification?

Solution

The words, "IF I KNEW THIS COUNTRY I MIGHT," eliminated Explorer Cantwell, who did know the country, as the last survivor. "SAID NO LIONS HERE BUT I'M AFRAID THEY'LL GET ME," proves the survivor was not the big-game hunter, Gibbon, who would know there are no lions in South America. The last man to die was not the entomologist, Wilding, as the message says, "I DON'T KNOW IF BUG COLLECTION OF VALUE." Finally, the words, "HE PERFORMED AMPUTATION AND TOLD ME HOW TO," eliminate the physician, Burton. Therefore the writer of the message and the last man to die must be the capitalist, Mark Dalton.

In Volume III, as an experiment, we gave you an adventure of Ellery Queen in radio-dramatic form. The response has encouraged us to give you another. "The Adventure of The Meanest Man in the World" has never been published anywhere.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MEANEST MAN IN THE WORLD

By ELLERY QUEEN

The Characters

ELLERY QUEEN . . . . . *the detective*
NIKKI PORTER . . . . . *his secretary*
WILL KEELER . . . . . *a poor man*
ANNIE KEELER . . . . . *his wife*
JACK KEELER . . . . . *their 18-year-old son*
MADGE KEELER . . . . . *their daughter (who does not appear)*
SYLVESTER GAUL . . . . . *the meanest man in the world*
PIETRO COLUCCI . . . . . *a handyman*
RILEY . . . . . *a building superintendent*
SHAW . . . . . *Keeler's attorney*
RUSSELL . . . . . *a district attorney*
JUSTICE GODDARD . . . . . *who presides*
DR. PROUTY . . . . . *the Assistant Medical Examiner*
TURNKEY . . . . . *at the Tombs*
and a JURY — WITNESSES — COURT CLERK — COURTROOM SPECTATORS, *etc.*

Scene

New York City: Courtroom, the Tombs, Gaul Building, etc.

SCENE I: *A Courtroom in New York City*

(*The Courtroom is packed and buzzing. The* JUDGE's *gavel smartly commands silence.*)

CLERK: Order! Order in the Court!

JUDGE: (*Gravely*) Mr. District Attorney, is the jury just selected satisfactory to the People?

D.A.: It is!

JUDGE: Mr. Shaw, as counsel for the defendant charged with murder in the first degree, is the jury satisfactory to you?

SHAW: (*He is an elderly man*) Jury is satisfactory, Your Honor.

JUDGE: In the case of People against William Keeler — the Clerk will swear in the jury!

SCENE 2: *The Tombs*

(*A* TURNKEY *leads* ATTORNEY SHAW *and* MRS. KEELER *through a grim corridor of the tombs.* MRS. KEELER *is weeping softly.*)

SHAW: (*Anxiously*) Mrs. Keeler, we'll be at your husband's cell in a moment. Don't you think you ought to stop crying? For his sake?

MRS. KEELER: (*She is a plain uneducated woman, crying heartbrokenly*) My Will . . . settin' in the court today while you and the District Attorney picked out the jury! Did ye see Will's face, Mr. Shaw? Like he felt the hand o' death on him already! (*She sobs.*)

SHAW: (*Urgently*) You've got to brace up, Mrs. Keeler!

MRS. KEELER: I'm tryin' real hard, Mr. Shaw. . . . (*She gasps suddenly*) There's his cell! There's Will! How gray he got!

SHAW: Steady, Mrs. Keeler. (*They stop.* MRS. KEELER *whispers:* "*Will!*" *The* TURNKEY *unlocks the clanky cell door.*)

TURNKEY: (*Indifferently*) Keeler! Yer wife an' lawyer.

KEELER: (*He is an oldish "common man"*) Annie!

MRS. KEELER: Will! Oh, Will. . . . (*They keep up an inarticulate conversation as they embrace.*)

SHAW: (*Low*) All right, Guard. Leave us alone. (*The* TURNKEY *locks the cell door.*)

TURNKEY: Call me when yer through, Counselor. (*He leaves, whistling a gay tune.*)

MRS. KEELER: (*Crying*) How they treatin' ye, Will? I been so worried! With you so sick, an' all. . . .

KEELER: I'm fine, Annie. How's my boy Jack? And Madge? They workin'? You got money?

MRS. KEELER: (*Quickly*) Oh, we're gettin' along grand, Will! Jack's got a swell new job runnin' an elevator, an' Madge —

SHAW: (*Coughing*) Keeler, we have a lot of work to do before the trial begins next Monday. . . .

KEELER: (*Slowly*) Yeah. Set down here on my bunk, Annie. . . . Mr. Shaw, I'm just a plain ignorant man, and you're a big lawyer. But just the same, there's somethin' I don't understand. Settin' in court t'day, watchin' how you picked my jury —

SHAW: (*Gently*) What is it that's bothering you, Keeler?

KEELER: How come you didn't chal-

lenge that Juror Number Six — that man Ellery Queen?

SHAW: Ellery Queen? (*Patiently*) Why, Will, Mr. Queen is one of New York's most prominent citizens —

MRS. KEELER: An' isn't that girl that was picked, his sec'atary?

SHAW: Yes, Mrs. Keeler — Nikki Porter. Their names happened to be drawn for the Blue Ribbon panel.

KEELER: (*Doggedly*) I ain't sayin' nothin' against Mr. Queen an' Miss Porter. But I heard a couple o' noospaper men sayin' they couldn't figger out how a smart lawyer like Shaw let Queen be a juror — they said the D.A. was tickled to death —

SHAW: (*Abruptly*) Look, Keeler. You've got to know the truth, and now that you've brought it up . . . Keeler, you're in a pretty desperate jam.

KEELER: (*Heavily*) You mean — I ain't gotta chance?

MRS. KEELER: Oh, Will! (*She cries afresh.*)

SHAW: (*Grimly*) I mean that the circumstantial case against you is so strong, Keeler, that only a miracle can get you off!

KEELER: (*Muttering*) So that's the way it is. They all think I murdered Sylvester Gaul. They're gonna gimme the electric chair for somethin' I didn't do.

MRS. KEELER: They can't! They mustn't! Oh, Will, Will. . . .

SHAW: Now you ask why I allowed Mr. Ellery Queen to be chosen as a member of the jury that will try you. It's *because* the case is so hopeless against you, Keeler!

KEELER: (*Dazedly*) My head's . . . kind of . . . I don't get it.

SHAW: Queen has an extraordinary reputation, Keeler. He's a detective — quite at the top of his profession . . . a great man. I let Ellery Queen stay on that jury because *he's our only hope!*

MRS. KEELER: Ye mean Mr. Queen'll get my Will off, Mr. Shaw?

SHAW: If there's a logical loophole in the circumstantial case, Queen will spot it even though none of the rest of us can. And if he becomes convinced your husband is innocent, Mrs. Keeler — as I do just on faith and my knowledge of human beings — then that jury will *not* bring in a verdict of guilty!

MRS. KEELER: (*Sobbing*) I'll pray every night to the dear Lord to make Mr. Queen see the truth an' save my Will!

SCENE 3: *The Courtroom Again*

(*The Courtroom is murmuring.*)

NIKKI: (*In the jury box*) Oh, Ellery . . . my heart's in my throat.

Really it is.

ELLERY: (*Same*) Yes, it's a great responsibility, Nikki, sitting in judgment on another human being.

NIKKI: And that poor woman, Mrs. Keeler. Look at her over there — *her* heart is in her eyes, and it's crying.

ELLERY: (*Gently*) You'll have to stick to the evidence, Nikki. (*Clerk off: "Hear Ye!"*) Shhh! There's the Clerk.

CLERK: Hear ye, hear ye! (*He speaks rapidly.*) Supreme Court General Sessions Part Four Justice Goddard presiding! Court is called to order! Please rise! (*There is a rustle of Mass rising.* JUSTICE GODDARD *enters from chambers.*)

JUDGE: Court is now in session. Please be seated. (*Everyone sits down.*) Are the People ready?

D. A.: Ready, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Is the defendant ready?

SHAW: Ready, Your Honor.

JUDGE: The People will proceed.

D.A.: If the Court please, the People call as their first witness . . . Jack Keeler.

CLERK: Jack Keeler! Jack Keeler to the stand! (JACK *approaches.*) Here, please. Left hand on the Bible — raise your right hand — do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

JACK: (*He is 18 — a nervous, ordinary New York boy*) I do.

CLERK: Be seated.

D.A.: (*He coughs, clears his throat*) Hrrrm! Your name?

JACK: (*Inaudibly*) Jack Keeler.

D.A.: Occupation?

JACK: I run an elevator in an office buildin'.

D.A.: You're the son of the defendant, William Keeler?

JACK: Yeah. I mean — yes, sir.

D.A.: Do you recall the events of Friday, February twenty-third last?

JACK: (*Low*) Yes, sir. (*Bursting out*) But I don't *wanna* testify! He's my old man — my own father —

(*The crowd murmurs.*)

JUDGE: (*Sternly*) There must be no demonstration in the Court! (*Kindly*) Mr. Keeler, confine yourself to answering the District Attorney's question.

JACK: (*Whispering*) Yes, sir.

D.A.: Jack, tell the jury in your own words exactly what occurred between nine and nine-thirty o'clock on the morning of the date specified.

JACK: (*Reluctantly*) Well . . . this Sylvester Gaul had an employment agency in this office-buildin', see . . . an' he used to hire the help for the buildin', too. Anyway, that mornin' around nine o'clock, my father an' mother an'

me — the three of us — we're sittin' in the waitin' room of Gaul's office waitin' for the old guy to see us . . . (*His voice fades.*)

SCENE 4: *Jack Keeler's Story*

JACK: (*Impatiently*) Where *is* that old Scrooge? How long's he gonna keep us sittin' out here, mom?

MRS. KEELER: Now Jack, have patience. Oh, Will, I hope Mr. Gaul gives me back my old job as cleanin' woman in the buildin' here.

KEELER: (*Bitterly*) If the doctor hadn't made me quit *my* job. . . . What good am I, Annie? Old, sick, can't even take care o' my own flesh an' blood. . . .

JACK: Aw, Pop, cut it out. We'll be okay soon's I land this job with Gaul runnin' an elevator. Think I'd come drawlin' to that wormy old screw if — (*The door opens.*)

MRS. KEELER: (*Frantically*) Jack! Hold yer tongue! Here's Mr. Gaul!

GAUL: (*He is a nasty crackle-voiced old man*) Jack Keeler? Come into my private office!

JACK: (*Sullenly*) Okay, Mr. Gaul. (MR. *and* MRS. KEELER *make as if to rise.*)

GAUL: No — the father and mother stay out there till I finish with this son of yours! In here, boy. (GAUL *takes* JACK *into his office and sits down behind his desk.*) Ahhhh. . . . Now! What's this about you wanting a job in my building?

JACK: (*Trying to be pleasant*) Look, Mr. Gaul — I got a tip you need another elevator-boy —

GAUL: Why, yes, Jack, I do. You'd like the job?

JACK: (*Eagerly*) Yes, sir, Mr. Gaul! We sure need it!

GAUL: (*Heartily*) Well, Jack my boy, it's yours!

JACK: Gee — thanks, Mr. Gaul! Maybe you ain't such a tough tomata after all. . . .

GAUL: (*Interrupting*) At the . . . ah . . . usual arrangement, of course.

JACK: Whadda ya mean "usual arrangement"?

GAUL: Job pays eighteen a week. But (*he coughs, unctiously*) each week you'll return eight dollars to me, Jack, and —.

JACK: (*Yelling*) So Mom *wasn't* from hunger! That's the kinda crook you are! A kickback!

GAUL: (*Coldly*) That's all.

JACK: Wait! (*He swallows hard.*) Wait, Mr. Gaul. I . . . I'm sorry I blew my top. I'll . . . take it.

GAUL: (*Briskly*) Thought so! (*Rustle of papers.*) Now if you'll sign this little form — just a form —

JACK: (*Suspiciously*) What for?

What's it say?

GAUL: (*Blandly*) It says I've lent you money, Jack, and that you promise to pay back eight dollars a week till your indebtedness is discharged.

JACK: You — cheap — chiseler! (*He stops, panting*) Okay. Gimme that pen before I choke! (*He writes.*) There! (GAUL *rises.*)

GAUL: (*Chuckling*) Let me show you out, my boy. (*He opens the door and calls.*) Mrs. Keeler!

MRS. KEELER: Yes, Mr. Gaul! (*Firmly*) Now Will, you just sit here . . . (KEELER, *off: "But Annie — I don't like it!"*)

GAUL: (*Interrupting*) Hurry up. I haven't all day!

MRS. KEELER: Yes, sir. (*She approaches, asks in a low tone*) Jack — did you get it?

JACK: (*Passing*) Yeah — with an eight-buck kickback, the old —!

MRS. KEELER: (*Hastily*) Stay out here with your father, Jack. (GAUL: "*Come in, will you?*") Yes, sir, Mr. Gaul! (KEELER *and* JACK *confer as* GAUL *closes the door on them.*)

GAUL: Siddown. (MRS. KEELER *anxiously complies.*) Now what is it?

MRS. KEELER: I want my old job back, Mr. Gaul.

GAUL: You do. (*viciously*) You *were* a cleaning woman for me once — and quit!

MRS. KEELER: I know, Mr. Gaul, but they offered me a livin' wage . . . I mean — you was payin' me so little. But now they had a fire, an' . . . I'm outa work again. All we got comin' in is the sal'ry you pay my daughter Madge for workin' for you in your other office next door. My husband's sick, my boy's been outa work. . . . Please, Mr. Gaul, gimme back my old job.

GAUL: (*Heartily*) Down on your luck, hey? Well, Mrs. Keeler, seeing that you once worked for me. . . . How much did I use to pay you?

MRS. KEELER: Fourteen a week, but I owed you four dollars a week 'count of that paper you made me sign —

GAUL: Fourteen. Hmmm. Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. You can go to work here again for fourteen a week —

MRS. KEELER: Oh, thank ye, Mr. Gaul!

GAUL: (*Dryly*) You're welcome. I said fourteen a week, but . . . uh . . . you sign this new paper promising to "pay back" *six* dollars a week from now on, hmm? (*Rustle of papers.*)

MRS. KEELER: (*Slowly*) That'll leave me eight . . . I'll sign. (*She signs her name painfully.*)

GAUL: That'll be all.

MRS. KEELER: (*Suddenly*) Some day the good Lord'll strike you dead!

GAUL: (*Indifferently*) Get out, get out.

MRS. KEELER: (*Passionately*) You suck money outa all the poor people you hire — everybody hates you! (GAUL *laughs.*) Some day somebody's gonna . . .

GAUL: (*Hard*) Some day somebody's going to — *what*, Mrs. Keeler? (*There is a sharp knock on the door.*) Come in! (*The door opens and* WILL KEELER *appears.*)

MRS. KEELER: (*Terrified*) Will! Stay out there with Jack!

KEELER: (*Grimly*) Annie. Go on out with the boy. I wanna talk to this man.

MRS. KEELER: Will! What are ye gonna do?

KEELER: Do what I say, Annie. (*She leaves, terrified, and her tearful ad lib fading.* KEELER *shuts the door.*) Gaul, I'm Annie Keeler's husband. I came here today to —

GAUL: Looks like an all-day session with the Keeler family, so I may as well sit down. (*He does so.*) Well? What d'ye want? I just hired your wife and son!

KEELER: (*Bitterly*) At the wages you pay we'd need *ten* in the fam'ly to make ends meet!

GAUL: They don't have to work for me if they don't want to.

KEELER: (*Tensely*) It don't mean nothin' to you that hard-workin' people got to live, too — that we *gotta* take your jobs, or starve to death . . . or go beggin' for relief. . . .

GAUL: Come, come, Keeler. What do you want? I'm a busy man.

KEELER: (*Hard*) I come here today for one reason — to warn you, Gaul! If you lay yer hands on my daughter Madge just once more, I'll kill you!

GAUL: Why, you — (*Shouting*) So she's blabbed, has she? After I warned her not to! Well, she's fired! And tell that wife and son of yours they're fired, too — before they even start! Get out!

KEELER: (*Shouting*) You scum! You ain't fit to live!

GAUL: (*Shouting*) Get out, or I'll call a policeman!

KEELER: (*Through his teeth*) I'll get out! (*He storms out, slamming the door.*)

MRS. KEELER: Will! What happened in there?

JACK: Pop! What was that chiselin' bum yellin' for?

KEELER: (*Heavily*) I guess I fixed it. Annie, Gaul's fired you, Madge, and Jack. . . .

MRS. KEELER: (*Horrified*) Fired us!

JACK: But why, Pop? What'd you say to him?

KEELER: Never mind. Let's get outa here.

MRS. KEELER: Wait, Will! We haven't got a cent in the house, and the Lord knows when we'll find other jobs. . . . I'm goin' in there and ask Mr. Gaul to take us back!

KEELER: Annie! I won't have it! Let's go, I say!

MRS. KEELER: Will, we got no choice . . . (*She opens the door again.* GAULT *is groaning inside.*) Will! Lookit . . . his . . . (*She screams.*)

JACK: (*Shouting*) Pop! His neck! There's a letter-knife *stuck in the back of Gaul's neck!*

KEELER: (*Hoarsely*) Mr. Gaul! Mr. Gaul! (GAUL *groans. Then he dies with a gurgly sound.*)

JACK: (*Whisper*) He's dead. Pop . . . *he just died.*

MRS. KEELER: (*Screaming hysterically*) He's been murdered! Will — they'll say *you murdered him!*

SCENE 5: *Back in the Courtroom — Two Weeks Later*

CLERK: Order in the Court! Order!

NIKKI: (*In the Jury box*) What a beast that man Gaul must have been, Ellery!

ELLERY: (*Same*) Nikki — jurors aren't permitted to converse.

NIKKI: (*Low — but indignant*) I don't care! No wonder Gaul's been called "the meanest man in the world"!

ELLERY: Nikki — please!

NIKKI: (*Rushing on*) Suppose Keeler did kill him —

ELLERY: (*Whispering*) This isn't proper, Nikki, but . . . there's no "suppose" about it. William Keeler's the only possible murderer.

NIKKI: (*Wailing*) Ellery! I *won't* believe it!

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) You heard the evidence these past two weeks. . . . (*The gavel bangs, and the room goes quiet.*)

JUDGE: (*Sternly*) If there's one more demonstration by the spectators, I'll have the room cleared. Proceed, Mr. Russell.

D.A.: Your Honor, the People rest.

SHAW: Your Honor!

JUDGE: Yes, Mr. Shaw?

SHAW: Your Honor, as counsel for the defendant, I move to dismiss the indictment on the ground that the prosecution has not proved a prima facie case!

JUDGE: Does the District Attorney wish to be heard on this motion?

D.A.: I do, Your Honor!

JUDGE: The jury is excused during counsels' argument.

CLERK: Jury, please follow me! (*The* JURY *rise.*)

NIKKI: (*Low — to* ELLERY) Darn it! We always have to leave the courtroom when the real fight starts, Ellery!

ELLERY: (*Same*) Quiet, Nikki. (*He and* NIKKI *and the rest of the* JURY *file out.*)

JUDGE: All right. I'll hear the District Attorney now.

D.A.: If the Court please — I maintain the defendant's motion to dismiss be denied on the ground that, from the evidence the State has submitted, the jury must inevitably draw the conclusion that the defendant, William Keeler, is *the only possible murderer of Sylvester Gaul!* (*Gavel.*) Have I the Court's permission to review briefly what the People have proved?

JUDGE: Proceed, Mr. Russell.

D.A.: We have shown that *only one door* opens into Gaul's private office — the door between the office and the waiting room. There is also *only one window* in Gaul's private office — behind his desk. But that window is twelve stories above street-level. No one could have entered through the window, not even a human fly — to imagine anyone climbing up or down the sheer face of the building is absurd. So Gaul *must* have been stabbed to death by one of the three Keelers — on their own admission in this Court no one else entered the waiting room from the public hall! Which of the Keelers stabbed Gaul? Let us look back upon the testimony. Gaul was alive when he ushered Jack Keeler, the son, back into the waiting room from his private office. Gaul was still alive when the mother, Mrs. Keeler, left his office after her husband broke in on them. *That places Gaul alive in his office with William Keeler!* But when the defendant, Keeler, returned to the waiting room after his interview with Gaul, he returned *alone.* And a few moments later, when the three Keelers went back into Gaul's office, they found him dying, stabbed in the neck.

True, Your Honor, this is a circumstantial case, but I submit it is the strongest the People have ever prosecuted in this State! There can be only one possible explanation — William Keeler, and William Keeler only — the last physically with him before Gaul's death — could have murdered Gaul!

The defendant's motive is clear — hatred. I presume the defense will characterize the victim as "the meanest man in the world," a popular newspaper phrase. Even if we accept this obvious exaggeration — no human being could be as mean as Gaul has been painted — that is no excuse for the defendant's taking the law into his own hands and . . .

JUDGE: You're not making a summa-

tion to the jury, Mr. Russell. Mr. Shaw, do you wish to be heard on this motion?

SHAW: Your Honor, the District Attorney has expressed the opinion that no person in the world could have been so vile and contemptible as the deceased has been painted. If Your Honor denies our motion to dismiss, I shall produce innumerable witnesses who will testify to quite the contrary!

SCENE 6: *The Courtroom; a Few Days Later*

(*A* WITNESS *for the* DEFENDANT *has just been interrogated by* SHAW.)

SHAW: That's all, Miss Vogel. Your witness, Mr. Russell.

D.A.: (*Indifferently*) No questions.

CLERK: The witness will stand down. Pietro Colucci to the stand! Pietro Colucci! (*A workman approaches.*) Raise your right hand. Do you solemnly — no, your right hand, please — do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

COLUCCI: (*He is frightened*) Yes-sa.

CLERK: Siddown.

SHAW: Your name?

COLUCCI: Pietro Colucci.

SHAW: By whom were you employed during February of this year, Mr. Colucci?

COLUCCI: Mist' Gaul, in da Gaul office-a building.

SHAW: What was the nature of your duties?

COLUCCI: Feex-a things, watch-aman, wash all da windas, take care-a lights — gener-al handy-man.

SHAW: What were your wages?

COLUCCI: Sixteen dollar' a week.

SHAW: Did you ever turn back part of your wages to Mr. Gaul?

COLUCCI: Yes-sa. Half-a da wages, every week. Mist' Gaul say I gotta. Make me sign-a pap'. I need-a job . . . got wife an' ten keeds. (*Laughter in Court. It subsides as the gavel bangs.*)

SCENE 7: *The Courtroom, Still Later*

(*An Irishman is on the stand*)

SHAW: . . . place this exhibit in evidence. Now Mr. Riley, as superintendent of the Gaul Building, you received fifty dollars per week salary?

RILEY: (*Respectfully*) Yes, sor, I did that.

SHAW: And according to the document you signed, how much did you have to pay back to Mr. Gaul out of your salary?

RILEY: (*Passionately*) The dhirty crool dog made me kick back twenty dollars a week! (*The gavel again.*)

SCENE 8: *Same, Still Later*

(*The* ASSISTANT MEDICAL EXAMINER *is on the stand.*)

SHAW: Now Dr. Prouty, as Assistant Medical Examiner you examined the body of the deceased on the scene of the tragedy?

PROUTY: (*He is offhand and bored*) That's right, Counselor.

SHAW: It is the privilege of the defense in rebuttal to requestion the prosecution's witnesses. I ask you as an expert, Dr. Prouty: Isn't it possible that the defendant left Sylvester Gaul alive and alone in his office, and that Gaul then took up his letter-knife from the desk behind which he was sitting, and stabbed *himself?*

PROUTY: You mean is it possible Gaul committed suicide?

SHAW: Exactly, Dr. Prouty!

PROUTY: Nope. Gaul was stabbed in the back of the neck, at the right-hand side as you face the body. Angle and direction of stab-wound make the theory of suicide impossible.

ELLERY: (*Suddenly*) Your Honor! (*The other* JURORS *look surprised.*)

JUDGE: Yes? Juror Number Six? What is it, please?

ELLERY: Your Honor, may I ask the witness several questions?

JUDGE: It's a juror's right to question witnesses, Mr. Queen. (*There is another outburst from the* SPECTATORS.)

NIKKI: (*During the commotion*) Ellery! You've got something — at last?

ELLERY: (*Quietly*) I think so, Nikki.

NIKKI: I'm so glad! (*Order is restored.*)

JUDGE: You may proceed, Mr. Queen.

ELLERY: Dr. Prouty, testimony has been given that the right side of Gaul's desk, as you face it, stood flat against the right-hand wall of his office. Could the blow with the letter-knife have been delivered from *in front of* the desk?

PROUTY: Hi, Hawkshaw! (*The audience titters.*) I mean Mr. Queen. Let's see. No, it couldn't. If the murderer were right-handed, his hand would have to hit the right wall, preventing the blow from landing with the force it did. And if the murderer were left-handed, he couldn't have got all the way around from the front of the desk, either.

ELLERY: Dr. Prouty, could the murderer have delivered the fatal blow if he had been standing to the *left* side of the desk — the side *not* against the wall?

PROUTY: No. Desk was too long. Couldn't possibly have stretched that far, judging from where the victim was sitting.

ELLERY: Then the murderer must have stood *behind* Gaul when he stabbed Gaul?

PROUTY: Come to think of it . . . yes. Only way it could have been done!

ELLERY: Standing *behind* Gaul, did the murderer strike with his *right* hand?

PROUTY: Why, no. He couldn't have!

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) In other words, Dr. Prouty, it's your expert opinion the murderer was *left-handed?*

PROUTY: (*Firmly*) Yes.

ELLERY: Thank you. Your Honor, speaking as a juror, I should like to know if the accused, William Keeler, is left-handed! (*The Courtroom gasps.* JUSTICE GODDARD *uses his gavel freely.*)

SHAW: That's all, Dr. Prouty! (PROUTY *leaves the stand, grinning at* MR. QUEEN.) Your Honor, I wish to recall William Keeler to the stand!

JUDGE: Order! Proceed, Mr. Shaw!

CLERK: William Keeler! (*There is an audible rustle from the* SPECTATORS.)

SHAW: Take the stand, Mr. Keeler!

KEELER: (*Dazed*) Yes, sir. . . .

SHAW: Mr. Keeler, answer this one question. *Are you right-handed or left-handed?* (*A tense silence ensues.*)

JUDGE: (*Gently*) Answer your counsel's question, Mr. Keeler.

KEELER: (*In a low voice*) I been in this courtroom fer weeks, Judge. Everybody's seen me writin', an' doin' things at the table down there, with my hands. So everybody knows *I'm right-handed!* (*The rustle grows.*)

SHAW: (*Instantly*) If it please Your Honor, *I renew my motion to dismiss the indictment!* (*Gavel vigorously. The rustle ceases. There is a slight pause.*)

JUDGE: (*Gravely*) In the light of testimony that the murderer was left-handed, and the defendant is *right*-handed — which we have all observed repeatedly demonstrated by the defendant during the course of this trial — I grant the defendant's motion. The indictment is dismissed, the jury is discharged, and the defendant released! (NIKKI: "*Wheel*" *and there is pandemonium. Shouts of reporters fade as they dash for phones.* ELLERY *is surrounded by an admiring crowd.*)

NIKKI: Ellery, that was *wonderful!* Gosh, I'm c-crying! Look — here's Mr. Shaw — and Mr. and Mrs. Keeler — and Jack and Madge Keeler — coming over to you. . . .

SHAW: Mr. Queen, I can't tell you how — (ELLERY: "That's all right, Mr. Shaw." *But he is interrupted.*)

MRS. KEELER: (*Weeping*) You gave me back my husband, Mr. Queen! (ELLERY: "*Now really, Mrs. Keeler* —")

KEELER: (*Huskily*) I don't know what I can ever do to thank ye, Mr. Queen — Jack, Madge — say somethin' to Mr. Queen. . . . (ELLERY *Embarrassed:* "*Please — really* —")

JACK: Gosh, Mr. Queen —

ELLERY: Now, now. It's perfectly all right. I merely happened to see the fallacy in the prosecution's case. . . .

JUDGE: Juror Number Six! Mr. Queen!

NIKKI: Ellery! Judge Goddard is calling you!

ELLERY: (*Gratefully*) Excuse me, please! Yes, Judge?

JUDGE: Mr. Queen, you've averted a serious miscarriage of justice. This Court is happy to express its gratitude. (*Laughter and approving remarks in the background, a little applause.*)

ELLERY: Thank you, Judge. It's been a privilege to serve. As a matter of fact, this trial has not only educed facts which proved the accused innocent, but has also brought to light facts which point to the *real murderer*! (*There is a shocked pause.*)

NIKKI: Ellery Queen! Even in a *trial?*

JUDGE: (*Amazed*) You mean to stand here, Mr. Queen, and tell me that you know —

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) Yes, Your Honor. I know who *did* kill Sylvester Gaul!

At this point in the radio drama ELLERY QUEEN *has indicated that he knows the identity of the murderer. Do you? You can add competitive fun to your reading enjoyment of this mystery drama by stopping here and trying to figure out the solution before* ELLERY *gives it. Naming the correct criminal is not enough, if you play the game according to the rules. You must get the correct reasoning, too!*

Now, if you think you've figured it out . . . go ahead and read ELLERY QUEEN'S *own solution to* The Adventure of the Meanest Man in the World.

The Solution

SCENE 9: *Same, Immediately After*

JUDGE: Clerk, get some quiet here! (*The* CLERK *does so.*) Unusual proceeding, but we may as well clean this matter up here and now! Go on, Mr. Queen. (*Murmurs down.*)

NIKKI: (*In a proud whisper*) Do your stuff, Mr. Queen!

ELLERY: (*Quietly*) The facts are plain, your Honor. Mrs. Keeler and her son Jack had mutual alibis

for the time Gaul was murdered — they were in the waiting room together. Keeler, the father, was the only apparent possibility. But I've shown that Keeler couldn't have stabbed Gaul. So when Keeler stormed out of Gaul's office Gaul *was* alive, and he was murdered in those few minutes between the time Keeler came out and the time the Keelers went into the office in a group to find Gaul gasping out his life. In other words, since the three Keelers are innocent, there must have been *a fourth person* in that private office during those few minutes!

JUDGE: That's what I fail to understand, Mr. Queen. How could there have been, from the facts?

ELLERY: Well, let's see. How did this fourth person get *into* Gaul's office? Through the waiting room? No — the Keelers all maintained no one but themselves entered the outer office from the public hall while they were there. Conclusion: the murderer entered by the only other opening into Gaul's inner office — *the window behind Gaul's desk!*

NIKKI: But Ellery — twelve stories above the street —

ELLERY: Wait, Nikki. So we now know two vital facts about the murderer: one, he is left-handed; and two, he came (and went) through the office-window! Have we someone involved in the case who had motive against Gaul, who is also left-handed, and who could have entered and left the office through that window? We have! Judge, one witness in this trial had the job of *washing all the building windows.* . . . Pietro Colucci, Gaul's handyman! So Colucci murdered Gaul! (*There is a shout, and* COLUCCI *struggles with an attendant.*)

JUDGE: Hold that man, Officer! I see what you mean, Mr. Queen! Colucci came into Gaul's office simply by attaching his window-cleaner's strap to the window of an adjoining office and swinging onto the ledge of Gaul's window!

ELLERY: Yes, Judge. And by doing so, he was directly behind Gaul's seated figure in the very position from which we now know Gaul was stabbed! (COLUCCI *is overpowered.*)

NIKKI: But Ellery . . . is this man Colucci *left-handed?*

ELLERY: Oh, yes. We all heard the incident that established Colucci as left-handed! Remember when the Clerk of the Court swore him in as a witness for the defense? The Clerk instructed Colucci to raise his right hand — then the Clerk distinctly said — "*No, your right*

hand, please!" That could only mean that Colucci had instinctively raised his *left* hand to take the oath — establishing him beyond doubt as a left-handed person!

JUDGE: (*Sternly*) Pietro Colucci, did you murder Sylvester Gaul?

COLUCCI: (*Agonized yelling*) I keel-a him all-a right! Da blood-suck'! He make-a me work for eight dollar a week like I say in da trial — eight dollar for a wife an' ten keeds! An' one-a my keeds, she die 'cause I can't afford operashun! I tell-a heem — gimme more wages, please, Mist' Gaul — save-a my little-a girl's life. He laugh in my face. He ain' no char-i-ty, he say. Yes, I keel-a heem — he's-a da meanest man in da worl'! (*The music comes up.*)

"Q"

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